

JEWISH SOCIALIST

No 9 Spring 1987

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

£1

The left and the Holocaust



SHOAH

The roots of genocide

TREBLINKA

PERDITION

**Spotlight on the controversy
plus Jim Allen interview**

JEWISH SOCIALIST

BM 3725, LONDON WC1N 3XX

No 9 Spring 1987

EDITORIAL

In the years since 1945, there have been those who devoted their lives to studying, understanding and communicating the realities of the Holocaust, and those who have been equally devoted to obscuring, or even denying, the truth about the Nazis. Such a cataclysm — the destruction of millions of people, and the all-pervading terror surrounding that destruction — is difficult and painful even to think about, let alone analyse with any objectivity, and we must be deeply grateful to those who have had the courage to steep themselves in the facts.

Unfortunately there is a corollary: a great deal of nonsense has also been talked about the Holocaust, and it has been used to justify the unjustifiable or as an easy way of explaining events which would otherwise require a great deal of hard work to come to terms with.

The vested interest of the Far Right in rewriting this period is clear: concentration camps have not been good for fascism's image, so an important aspect of antifascist struggle has been to keep the record straight. The bedrock of socialist politics must be a commitment to historical truth. To obscure, omit or rewrite events, however uncomfortable or depressing, means that *all* we can say is that fascism is nasty and so are those who

collude with it.

Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*, examines minutely the events of the Holocaust, and "Lest we forget" (page 13), an interview with a group of young Belgians about their reactions to it, should force us to think creatively about how we can teach the post-War generations — Jewish and non-Jewish — the lessons of that period. Ralph Levinson's and Michael Heiser's responses to the film (pages 11 and 14) make a start on that process.

In contrast, the storm surrounding Jim Allen's play, *Perdition*, has generated rage and confusion rather than reason and clarity, diverting the debate from issues which the Left and the Jewish community urgently need to thrash out. David Cesarani assesses the play itself (page 4) and David Rosenberg looks critically at the controversy (page 9). Jim Allen, defends the play, and talks about the campaign to prevent it being staged (page 8).

And in case, after all that, you need reminding, Tony Blend gives a chilling description of the skilled media techniques of Jean-Marie Le Pen (page 20). He charts the appeal and success of this charismatic leader of the French National Front, warning: it could happen here.

CONTENTS

News:

Jews Against Apartheid; Video on Jewish Socialism; Jewish Feminist anthology; Jerusalem information centre closed 2

Perdition:

Stage-managed antisemitism by David Cesarani 4
Zionism in the limelight by Roberto Sussman 6

Spotlight on the author 8
Raising the curtain on history by Dave Rosenberg 9

Shoah:

Screen memory by Ralph Levinson 11
Lest we forget translated by Michael Heiser 13
Icon of suffering by Michael Heiser 14

Warsaw ghetto:

Uprising! by Steve Ogin 16
Songs of the ashes by Chaim Neslen 18

Le Pen — the writing on the wall by Anthony Blend 20
Gospel truth as historical falsehood by Steve Cohen 22
Cloud over Vanunu trial by Adam Keller 25
Israel breaks with South Africa by Elfi Pallis 26
Coming home to roots by Lindsay Levy 27
All our yesterdays by Adrienne Wallman . . . 28
Through the eyes of a child by Tessa M Shephard 29
Letters 31

Review:

Anne Krisman reviews Jew Boy by Simon Blumenfeld 31

Though we have managed to keep the price of *Jewish Socialist* the same for two years, we regret that due to rising costs, we are forced to charge £1 from now on. But we are increasing the number of pages to 32 from this issue — so you'll still be getting wonderful value.

© *Jewish Socialist*. The opinions expressed in *Jewish Socialist* are those of individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Editorial Committee or of the Jewish Socialists' Group. This issue was produced by an Editorial Committee consisting of Julia Bard, Michael Heiser, Ruth Lukom, David Rosenberg, Adrienne Wallman and Marion Shapiro, with help from Colin Jimeck. *Jewish Socialist* is published quarterly by Jewish Socialist Ltd, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX. Typeset by Bread 'n' Roses, 2 St. Paul's Road, London N1. Tel: 01-354 0557.

NEWS

JEWES AGAINST APARTHEID

Jews Against Apartheid continues to thrive. The group recently organised a successful five day visit to Britain by Rabbi Ben Isaacson and Rev Zachariah Mokgoebo of South Africa. Rabbi Isaacson, an outspoken critic of apartheid who has incurred the hostility of his own congregation, as well as the authorities, because of his views, and Rev Mokgoebo, National Organiser of the *Belydende Kring* which consists mainly of Black dissident ministers within the Dutch Reformed Church, included this visit as part of a three month speaking tour of the USA and Europe in which they are trying to raise support for a new non-racial Centre for Justice and Peace in South Africa.

They addressed very well attended meetings in Leeds and London and spoke from the pulpit of Finchley Progressive Synagogue on Shabbat morning. They were also welcomed by the British Council of Churches and representatives of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and were interviewed by Radio London, Radio Leeds, the Jewish Gazette and Yorkshire Post.

At a public meeting at London's Mary Ward Centre, Rabbi Isaacson spoke of the Jews having become part of the "master race" in South Africa and how the dehumanisation of the blacks was no different to the treatment of the Jews by the Nazis. Individual Jews, he said, had always been involved in the anti-apartheid struggle, but they weren't visible as *Jews*, and the Jewish community had been lamentably visible by its absence.

Rev Z. Mokgeogo said movingly, that in South Africa

he seldom speaks to white audiences. One of his most telling observations was the way in which black parents in South Africa are humiliated by soldiers in front of their children and how they lose all authority and respect as a result.

He claimed the situation in South Africa was in danger of destroying the whole world.

The two speakers gave similar speeches at the Sinai Reform Synagogue in Leeds and the support there, particularly from many people who hadn't taken part in such activities before, shows that there is great need for a group like JAA.

JAA is now busy planning its future campaigns — these include a Third Seder to be held outside the South African Embassy on 16 April; an educational seminar; a JAA input into the main Anti-Apartheid Movement June event. The group is also preparing a report on Israel's links with South Africa.

JAA needs your support. For further details on future activities, membership, and contacts in your area, please write to Jews Against Apartheid, BM JAA, London WC1N 3XX.

ON TAPE

A welcome addition to the Spiro Institute's educational material is a new video called *The Face of Jewish Socialism* made by Ronnie Landau and Riva Krut. Showing the response of Jews to the conflicts of capitalism and vicious oppression in the Russian empire from 1881 to the First World War, the video, refreshingly, puts Jewish socialists centre stage. It also looks at the conflicts between Jewish socialists raising issues which have, in some cases, still not

been resolved.

The video is not without weaknesses: the section on Israel, inexplicably, relies more on Mark Twain than on the bitter debates between socialists — Zionist, anti-Zionist, and non-Zionist — of the day. It's a pity, too, that it stopped with World War I, giving no hint of the enormous influence of Jewish socialism, particularly in Poland, between the Wars.

Perhaps the makers will consider that as their next project . . .

The Face of Jewish Socialism runs for 32 minutes and costs £25 to buy or £5 to hire (plus £1 p&p). It can be obtained from Riva Krut, The Spiro Institute, c/o Westfield College, Kidderpore Avenue, London NW3 7ST.

WOMEN WRITE

After years of silence, Jewish feminists at last have a voice! Next year, the first anthology of writing by Jewish feminists living in Britain will be published by The Women's Press. You still have a chance to contribute to it!

It was as a response to antisemitism that this book was conceived — not as a negative recital of injustice, but as an affirmation of ourselves, and our determination to stand against such prejudice. We want to combat the assumption that, because we are Jewish, our experiences are all alike.

Because we have a number of articles from Ashkenazi women living in London, we would particularly welcome contributions from you if you live outside of that area, if you are Sephardic, or black and Jewish and if you are lesbian or disabled.

We're looking for fiction, prose or poetry, photos, or line drawings, and any other ideas that you may have. If you feel unconfident about writing, we can interview you.

We will send you a list of questions to stimulate ideas (if you send us an SAE). We will also accept contributions on tape.

Contact us by writing to JFP, 42 Inderwick Road, London N8 9LD.

JERUSALEM INFORMATION CENTRE CLOSED

Ha'aretz, 18 February 1987

The Israeli Civil Rights Association has protested against the use of an administrative order to close the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem. In a statement published yesterday, the Association emphasizes that the Centre had operated under the supervision of the censor, and argued that was sufficient to prevent any damage to Israeli security. "If police believe that other illegal activities took place in the Centre, it should have put those suspected of such activity on trial. There was no justification for closing the office prior to a criminal investigation, given the infringement of the freedom of expression and speech inherent in such a step. . ."

Left wing Jews and Arabs from Jerusalem are organising public protests against the decision to close the Centre, and against the arrest of its director, Michael Warshavsky. The Alternative Information Centre was closed two days ago, as already reported, on orders from the city police commander, who alleged that its members had engaged in hostile activity and had acted for the benefit of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. This is *the first time* that the police commander has used his power to do so, deriving from the Prevention of Terrorism Act, by issuing an administrative order to close a place which he believed to be serving a terrorist organisation.

PERDITION — stage-managed

Much of the discussion around Jim Allen's play, *Perdition*, was carried out without reference to the actual script. David Cesarani received the script at an early stage and here he analyses the themes contained within it.

antisemitism?

In 1920 the *Morning Post*, a reactionary, right-wing newspaper published the English version of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* under the title of *Causes of the World's Unrest*. The articles used well-known facts and recent historical events to prove a vast Jewish conspiracy to subvert the West. The Rothschilds were amongst the wealthiest financiers in Europe: Jewish capital was therefore the most powerful. Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg were Jewish: Jews were consequently deemed by nature revolutionary. The Zionist Organisation embraced Jews in every country: so there was self-evidently a world-wide Jewish conspiracy. This is the sort of interpretation of fact which can become a "warrant for genocide" and it is found throughout Jim Allen's play *Perdition*.

Jim Allen is a well-respected left-wing playwright whose credits include TV hits such as *Days of Hope*, but his latest work *Perdition* has triggered an avalanche of outrage and criticism. Michael Hastings, the head of the Literary Department at the Royal Court theatre, where it was to have been staged, has stated openly that the play "does provide a subtext acutely aimed at discrediting Zionism ..." (*Time Out*, 7-14 January 1987.) While this aspect of the play has stirred up feelings, there are more serious questions hanging over the way Allen treats Jews and Judaism.

THE KASTNER CASE

The play is based on an actual libel case brought by Rudolf Kastner against Malkiel Grunwald in Israel in 1953-54. Kastner had been a member of the Rescue Committee in Budapest during the War, but Grunwald accused him of collaborating with the Nazis and saving himself, his family and certain Zionist leaders while deserting the Jewish community. Mixed in with this was an attack on the *Mapai* Government and its leader, Moshe Shertok. Kastner had close links with *Mapai*; Shertok had been at the Palestine end of the wartime rescue efforts. Kastner faced a hostile anti-

Mapai lawyer and a similarly unsympathetic judge. Although he won the case technically, the court awarded derogatory damages and Kastner was forced to appeal, without success. He was assassinated before a court finally cleared his name.

The Kastner Case has attracted intense historical scrutiny. It raised the agonising dilemmas confronting Jewish leaders in Nazi Europe: should, could they have done more to resist? Hannah Arendt revived the issue in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1961) where she accused the Jewish leadership of incompetence and delivering the Jews into the hands of the Nazis. More recently, anti-Zionists have seized on the story as evidence of what they consider to be Nazi-Zionist collaboration. The most notorious exponent of this has been Lenni Brenner in *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* (1983). Brenner's "research" provides much of the material used by Allen.

VOLKISCH ZIONISM

The thesis is premised on the assumption that Zionism is a form of racism; hence, Zionist collaboration with the Nazis was natural. Zionism is here represented by a narrow stream in the movement, mainly evident in Germany in the decades on either side of the First World War, which echoed German *volkisch* rhetoric about blood and soil. Making this typical of Zionism is similar to the tactic of the right when they constantly cite Militant as representative of mainstream Labour views. Nevertheless it is true that this *volkisch* Zionism was exploited by Zionists in Germany after 1933 to get concessions from the Nazis in order to expedite Jewish emigration to Palestine. Its career was shortlived; by 1939, the Nazis dispensed with the facade of cooperation with any brand of Jews to any ends but their own. When emigration was replaced by ghettoisation and then extermination, any kind of identification of interests rested on either Nazi deceit or Jewish self-delusion.

Brenner and Allen, however, operate ahistorically. They begin with the UN 'Zionism equals Racism' line and add the prominence in Israel of Revisionist Zionists like Begin and Shamir who, at various times and in particular contexts, sought contacts with Fascist and Nazi powers. Reading back from this, they elevate *volkisch* Zionism to a false dominance in Zionist ideology and use it to explain Zionist conduct from 1896 onwards. In their account of the war, Zionist rescue attempts were half-hearted because they wanted only 'racially pure' and strong Jews in Palestine, not any old refugees. They attribute to Zionists, like Kastner, an easy familiarity with Nazis, like Eichmann, with whom they did deals to save themselves and selected Zionists.

The purpose of this is to discredit Zionism. In the USSR, this has been a standard procedure for many years, and commentators have noted how anti-semitic imagery has crept into this propaganda. Allen's play likewise tips over the precipice of anti-Zionism into antisemitism. Allen constructs a plot based on the uncovering of a Jewish conspiracy. In the process, the Jews are revealed as enormously powerful, but also cruel and devious. Moreover, his writing uses numerous metaphors which are found in classical Christian antisemitic writing. This sounds fantastic, but the play provides numerous examples.

CONSPIRACY REVEALED

The revelation of the conspiracy begins with the reading of the indictment. The fictional author of a pamphlet entitled *I Accuse*, Ruth Kaplan, is quoted as writing that "I accuse certain Jewish leaders of collaborating with the Nazis in 1944. Among them was Doctor Yaron [the fictionalised Kastner]. He knew what was happening in the extermination camps, and bought his own life and the lives of others with the price of silence." (p 7) As well as opening up the conspiracy, the accusation introduces the

theme of Jewish dealing — buying and selling lives. Further on it is claimed by Scott, the Defence lawyer, that Kastner "lied" to the Jews of Budapest: "You did everything in your power to mislead your people in order to save your own neck." (p 38).

The network of conspiracy spreads wider. It is stated that after the Nazis came to power, the Zionists in Germany had "secret meetings" with them (p 84). When the American Jewish leadership learned of the extermination of the Jews, it is alleged that they remained "silent". Their leader, Rabbi Stephen Wise, "agreed to remain silent ... acting as an accomplice of ... antisemites in the State Department" (p 67). Weizmann is also part of the conspiracy. On page 99, the Prosecution summarises part of the testimony of Ruth Kaplan: "Are you seriously suggesting that Chaim Weizmann ... was part of a cover up?" Ruth answers "Yes".

This conspiracy is juxtaposed with the power attributed to the Jews. Had they wanted to, they could have resisted the Nazis, in Berlin, Budapest or in Washington. Wise is accused of refusing to mobilise 'all-powerful American Jewry' (p 63). Jewish leaders in Germany refused to lead "Jewish workers [who] went out on to the streets" to fight the Brown-shirts (p 84). Yaron refused to mobilise "one million Jews who had nothing to lose. A formidable force" (p.156). Instead, the Zionists betrayed the Jews of Europe.

BETRAYAL

The theme of betrayal is significant. Wise, Weizmann and Ben Gurion betrayed the Jews; Kastner betrayed the Jews of Hungary and also the Jewish parachutists sent to save them. He is accused of betraying Hannah Senesh, in particular, on pp. 124-5 and 144-5. Ruth says it was the Zionist ideals gripping Yaron "which led him into betraying the Jews" (p 78).

As the play progresses, betrayal is seen to lie at the heart of the conspiracy and the cover-up. Scott makes the accusation that Yaron and the Zionists in Budapest were "hired functionaries who secretly crept out of Hungary at the height of the Deportations ... First you placed a noose around the neck of every Jew in Hungary, then you tightened the knot and legged it to Palestine" (pp. 138-9). "To save your hides you practically led them to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. You offered them soothing assurances while the gas ovens were made ready" (p 148). "A curtain of silence, prompted by shame, has shielded this dark page of Jewish history" (p 158), but the trial has now exposed this

conspiracy.

The theme of a covert plot and betrayal of course resonates with the story of Judas. This is reinforced by ascriptions of Jewish cruelty and callousness. The purpose of this is personal gain or the achievement of a greater good — Zionism. Ruth alleges that "in return for keeping the peace in the camps, they would be allowed to select certain Jews for rescue" (p 104). She says of the Zionists that "their goal was the creation of the Jewish Homeland, and to achieve this they were prepared if necessary to sacrifice the Jews of the diaspora" (p. 79). This was the "cruel criteria" of Zionism (p. 139).

CRUCIFIXION

Zionists in the play are motivated by personal gain or expediency in which the end (a Jewish State) justifies any means, no matter how despicable (p 149). They are characterised as heartless dealers in lives. "Israel was coined in the blood and tears of Hungarian Jewry" (p 149). These references to blood connect with a plethora of christological references in the last twenty pages of the play. Yaron alludes to Pontius Pilate and Golgotha on page 153; he describes the trial, which it turns out bizarrely was his own devising, as a "confessional" (p 161) in which he was hoping for "absolution" (pp. 165A, 163B). There are also several metaphors relating to the crucifixion. The junior counsel for the Defence gleefully exclaims to Scott "You crucified him" (p 161). Yaron congratulates Ruth on her pamphlet, for its "Words hard as nails" (p 164A). He approves of Scott too: "I like him. Merciless. I felt that he was ramming spears into my body" (p 163A).

The play virtually ends with references to "polluted wells" and, again, crucifixion (p 169). No specialist knowledge is required to recognise both these references as thematica in Christian antisemitism. Nor should it be difficult to draw parallels between Allen's writing and the familiar aspects of antisemitism in *The Merchant of Venice*. On page 156, Yaron and his accomplices are compared to "the Zionist knife in the Nazi fist". The *Merchant* abounds in cutting imagery. It also deals with the Jews as a cold people without sentiment, willing to sacrifice life for abstract higher principles. If Yaron delights in the "spears" which Scott thrusts into him, Shylock in Act 3, Scene 2 of the *Merchant* exclaims, "Thou sticks't a dagger in me" and like Yaron ends up grovelling for repentance.

Allen and Ken Loach respond to the criticism that the play is anti-Jewish by citing the fact that the heroes are "good

Jews". But what sort of Jews are they? They are anti-Zionist, or communist, or non-identifying or totally assimilated Jews — like "Green" the junior defence counsel, who seems to have lost the sort of Jewish name which distinguishes his opposite numbers (Lawson and Rattner). This is rather like using David Owen and Roy Jenkins as the "good socialists" in a play about the Labour Party.

JEWS ABANDONED

This commentary on the play does not deal in detail with its substantive misuse of history since this would fill another article. The bare facts are that the Jews were the victims in the Holocaust. They were abandoned by the Allied Powers and had no army, no airforce and no navy to protect them. In Hungary, which the play deals with, the able-bodied men were at the Eastern Front in slave labour brigades where they were brutally forced to work on German defence lines. The Rescue Committee in Budapest negotiated with the Germans, offering money to save the Jews of Hungary from deportation to Auschwitz. In a vile game, the Nazis then asked for trucks, for use against Russia, knowing that the Jews would transmit this to the Allies and disrupt the alliance between the Western Allies and Stalin. They probably had no intention of letting any Jews go at all. Trapped in this nightmare the chief negotiator, Rudolph Kastner, persuaded the Nazis to release a goodwill train. This was done after a long delay and filled according to a "list system". Around 1,800 Jews escaped. The Allies torpedoed the rescue plan, and the others were doomed.

Jim Allen, however does not appear to be unduly concerned with the facts, despite all his protestations otherwise. His drama is based on very limited research consisting of secondary sources, many of which are journalistic and unreliable. Established historians, Jewish and non-Jewish, have declared the play to be a farrago of selective quotations and sheer invention.

No amount of bravado and lying by those involved in this shameful episode can disguise the fact that *Perdition* is a play that has been totally discredited. Worse than its distortion of history, it is riddled with anti-Jewish themes and stereotypes. This was why the play was dropped by the Royal Court and claims that a "clique" of rich Jews who can "buy their own way" banned it seems to indicate that the protagonists of the play are willing to manipulate anti-Jewish stereotypes outside of the theatre as well as within it. □

Zionism in the limelight

Perdition condemns the Zionist response to Nazism during the holocaust in order to discredit Zionism today. Roberto Sussman argues that careless leaps between these very different historical contexts trivialise the Jewish experience under Nazism and do not contribute to a useful critique of contemporary Zionism.

A denunciation of the Zionist movement's role in Europe during the Second World War in Europe without properly conveying the full implications of the horror and helplessness suffered by European Jewish communities in the period, is bound to fail in its aim of critically analysing these historical events. The suspicion that *Perdition* denounces the Zionist movement in these terms is, obviously, a component of the hostile reaction against it. This component cannot be simply dismissed as "Zionist manipulation" or "Zionist lobbying". It is absolutely legitimate for the Jewish public in general to demand that tragic events in recent Jewish history should be examined in their proper context.

TRIVIALISING OPPRESSION

In the European context the Zionist movement represented (rightly or wrongly) the interests of an extremely fragile group. Whatever the Zionist movement achieved or failed to achieve for Jews in Europe or elsewhere, in its Middle Eastern context it cannot escape being morally accountable for its role in the dispossession of the Palestinian Arabs. However, just as no amount of pro-Zionist solidarity justifies dismissing or trivialising the plight of the Palestinians, no amount of solidarity with the Palestinian cause justifies judging the role of the Zionist movement in Europe as if it had possessed then the same leverage of power that it held in Palestine. An examination of events in the European context without due sensitivity, and with the ultimate purpose of scoring points in the ideological debate against Zionism, does not further the Palestinian cause and trivialises the oppression of European Jews.

MANIPULATING FACTS

By raising the issues of sensitivity and of placing facts in their proper context, I do not mean avoiding public discussion

of delicate events involving Jews or Zionists under Nazi occupation nor omitting uncomfortable facts. It is not the facts per se that make a critique worthy of consideration, but how these facts are incorporated in a methodologically sound analysis. That is, discussing these events without "attaching strings" to them or selectively fitting the facts into ideology. Obviously, it is impossible to attain an absolute level of objectivity; different commentators interpret history within the limits of their prejudices. However, there are different shades of grey in how various authors reject or yield into ideological manipulation of one sort or another.

Many Zionists do not admit that pro-Zionist authors ideologically manipulate historical facts. This manipulation manifests itself by automatically transposing the moral leverage that the Zionist movement, as a representative of an oppressed group, could claim for itself in the European context to the Middle Eastern context. The act of branding any critique of the Zionist movement as "antisemitism" follows from this unjustified transposition of contexts. But, not all pro-Zionist authors engage in these ideological manipulations, nor do it with the same degree of crudity. Also, antisemitic arguments emerge often in the guise of anti-Zionism (for example in Poland in the late sixties), and without being antisemitic, many critics of Zionism are dogmatic and crude. For example, among much of the left-wing anti-Zionist opinion there is an insistence that any discussion concerning Jewish religion, culture or contemporary history, even if not concerning the Middle East, should be automatically and completely subordinated to a critique and denunciation of Zionism.

CAN OF WORMS

Such an attitude is unacceptable. Instead, Zionist ideology should be criticised by

explicitly alluding to the circumstances in which its implementation has resulted in the oppression of the Palestinians. In dealing with Jewish issues in a context in which Jews are a minority, we have to proceed with a different approach than we would in the Israel-Palestine context. Those anti-Zionists, lacking this sensitivity, who believe that opening "historical cans of worms" in a provocative or aggressive manner will trigger a gut reaction which will force Jews to reject Zionist ideology, are mistaken. Such a gut reaction will more likely reinforce the fears and anxieties which keep most Jews attached to this ideology.

ROOTS OF SEPARATISM

The historical roots of today's mainstream Jewish consensus around Zionism lie, at least in part, in the obliteration during the Holocaust of Jewish anti-Zionist movements, such as the Bund, and the discrediting of other responses to antisemitism, such as assimilation. These responses required co-operation with progressive sectors of the non-Jewish population. Zionism, on the other hand, is the Jewish version of a separatist ideology of an oppressed minority, such as Lesbian separatism or Garveyism among American Blacks. Support for these reactions increases in direct proportion to the deterioration of the conditions faced by the minority in question and to the failure of non-separatist responses.

Before the Holocaust, the Zionist movement did not dominate Jewish political life, and was especially marginal in assimilated communities like those of Germany and Hungary. Hence, when Zionist leaders of the time, such as Ben Gurion or Weizmann, said this or that infamous passage, cited by anti-Zionists to claim that Zionists cared more for building a Jewish state than rescuing Jews, they were probably scorned by most Jews. But, if the Zionist movement

failed to save European Jews in peril, anti-Zionist alternatives did not save them either. Many Jews, who believed in anti-fascist solidarity, and so opposed the separatist option of Zionism as a matter of principle, were not assisted or, in many cases, simply betrayed by various organisations and governments also fighting Nazism. Jewish partisans in Eastern Europe were often treated with suspicion by non-Jewish partisans, and in many cases just hunted down by these same partisans or the Polish Home Army. M Zygielbojm, the Bundist leader who escaped to London in order to beg the RAF to bomb concentration camps,

committed suicide in an act of utter despair after failing to stir the apathy of the allied governments.

POWER AND RESOURCES

We cannot generalise; there were also acts of heroism of non-Jewish partisans, soldiers and ordinary citizens who saved persecuted Jews sometimes at the cost of their own lives. However, what figures prominently in the historical consciousness of post-Holocaust Jewry is the inactivity, not of ordinary citizens or organisations lacking political power and resources in the period (i.e., the Zionist movement), but of those powers who had the possibility to actually save Jews. It is this

factor, more than the merits of the Zionist movement, which after the Second World War recruited most Jews into supporting, or at least tolerating, Zionist ideology.

In Palestine, even before 1948, the Zionist movement had the power and resources of a state. Thus, its role in this context cannot be judged only on the basis of events in Europe and without bringing its responsibility in the dispossession of Palestinian refugees. In modern Israel, the Jews are the majority population and Zionism — not the Zionism of Martin Buber, Ahad Ha'am or Nahum Goldman, but the Zionism of the Labour-Likud establishment — is a state ideology which currently sanctions odious policies against the Palestinian Arab population.

Even within the realm of Jewish issues, independent Israeli scholars (not necessarily "anti-Zionists") of the calibre of Professor Y Leibowitz have often questioned different aspects of Zionism, Jewish history and religion. Specifically, the role of Zionism in Europe during the Second World War has often been criticised in such harsh terms that Lenni Brenner's *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* seems like a fairy tale in comparison. Unfortunately most of this work is in Hebrew and is not known outside Israel.

URGENT TASK

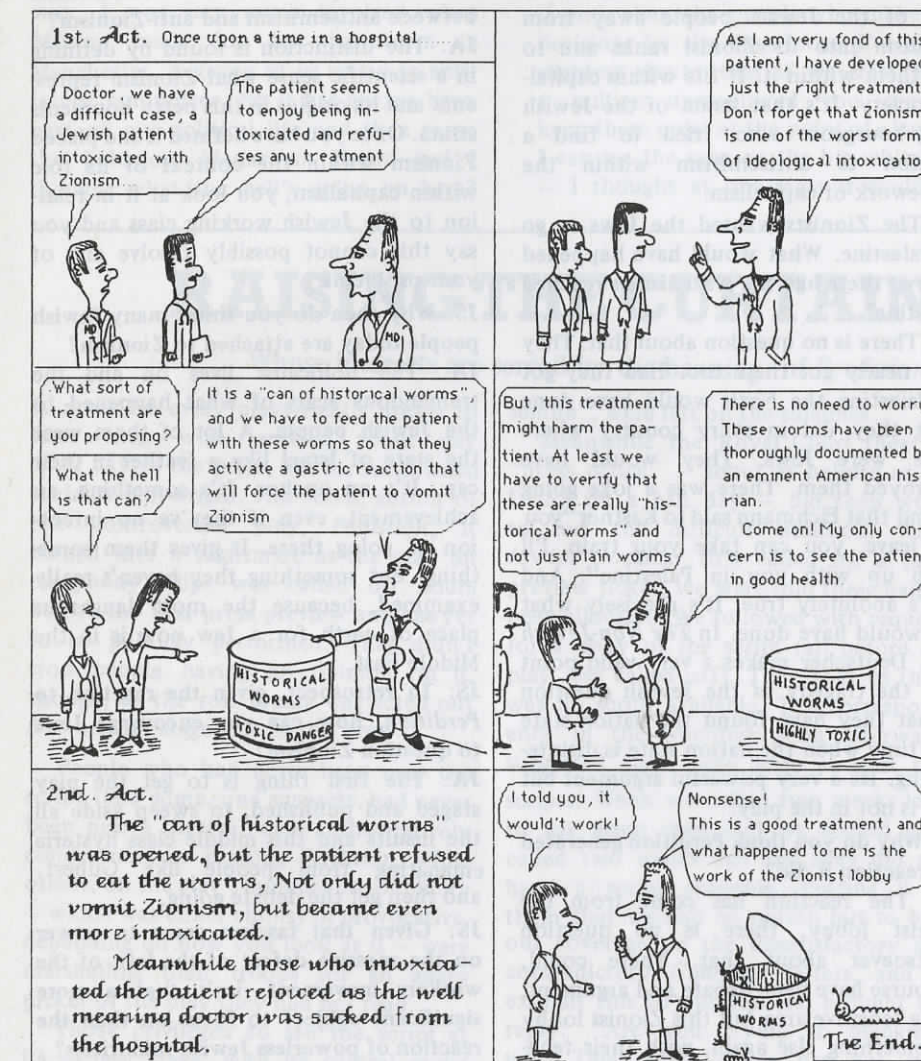
Although a critical examination of the role of the Zionist movement in Europe will have to be brought to a public forum sooner or later, making the Jewish public aware of the long term danger of providing unlimited and uncritical support for the policies of the State of Israel is a far more urgent task. Besides the value of *Perdition*, as a piece of drama or as a (possibly) well documented fictionalisation, I wonder if this play will be helpful in this task or if it merely aims to score points in a sterile ideological debate between Zionist and anti-Zionist dogmatists.

I have not seen the play *Perdition*, nor read its text, so I have not directly commented on it. But, even if the reaction against this play turns out to be justified, it should not prevent a public discussion of the issues and criticisms of the Zionist movement. In spite of possibly disagreeing with them, I support the right of Jim Allen and the actors involved in *Perdition* to stage this play and defend their views without being misrepresented or vilified. □



"GASTRITIS"

A stomachal farce in two acts



SPOTLIGHT ON THE AUTHOR

Jim Allen talks about the play and the storm surrounding it

JS: What is the main theme and message of *Perdition*?

JA: It deals with the role of the Zionist leadership during the war. It charges them with placing rescue secondary on the agenda to the building of a Jewish state. I also make what I think is a very powerful point that fascism and the social conditions under which fascism arises are still with us.

JS: What is the purpose of the play?

JA: It's to acquaint people with what happened during the war. Everything is so inter-related. It's impossible to talk about the holocaust without talking about Israel and the role of the Zionist leadership in Israel today. When they commit a crime against the Palestinian people, the holocaust has become a trump card and they always utilise it. Because we have this western guilt they are able to capitalise. The guilt doesn't belong to the working class because we didn't create the situation. And when we open the books we find that it was not as the hollywood myth-factory would have us believe. It wasn't *Exodus*; it wasn't the Zionists leading the struggle in occupied Europe. The historical documents are there, the facts are there. The lower down in the social scale, you found collaboration. This would fit into any community irrespective of religion, nationality or whatever. It would have happened in this country or in any other.

JS: How do you see the argument of Nazi-Zionist collaboration fitting into a class analysis given that Zionists were not the dominant class in most Jewish communities in this period?

JA: The play defines the philosophy of Zionism, and Zionism's attitude to anti-semitism. As a socialist I believe that antisemitism and racism fit within capitalism. The Zionists believed the old cliché; the only way to fight antisemitism is to get away from it, because they were in a minority. Along came Hitler to confirm the Zionist rationale. Zionism was never and could never be a solution to the Jewish question and that has been shown throughout its short history. It imposed itself. It's a kind of a parasitic thing with petty-bourgeois origins. But it had this attraction. In the same way that the SDP in Britain today prowls round the campfires trying to catch the odd person, feeding upon this and that, without any philosophy, without any theory, whereas with capital – the Tory

Party, and Labour – the working class, there are very clear divisions, so the Zionist movement tried to draw the best of the Jewish people away from socialism into its Zionist ranks and to lose them within it. It fits within capitalist society. It's that strata of the Jewish petty-bourgeois who tried to find a solution to antisemitism within the framework of capitalism.

JS: The Zionists wanted the Jews to go to Palestine. What would have happened to Jews there had the Nazi armies reached Palestine?

JA: There is no question about that. They very nearly got there too. Had they got to Palestine the Nazis would have done what they did in every country where there were Jews. They would have destroyed them. There was a joke going around that Eichmann said to Kastner "you can leave, you can take your train, I'll catch up with you in Palestine". And that's absolutely true. It's precisely what they would have done. In *The Non-Jewish Jew*, Deutscher makes a very valid point that the tragedy of the Jewish question is that they have found the nation state at a time when the nation state is disintegrating. It's a very powerful argument but that is not in the play.

JS: Why do you think *Perdition* generated the reaction it did?

JA: The reaction has come from the Zionist lobby, there is no question whatsoever about that. There could, of course have been debate and argument; it is a sensitive area but this Zionist lobby is something else again, with their technique of preventing it going on at theatres, the intimidation, phone calls and threats. The question is why they cannot afford a reappraisal of Zionist history. To criticise the leadership of Zionism during the holocaust is to question their credentials today.

JS: What reaction would you have liked from the Jewish community?

JA: I'm still hoping to get it from the Jewish community. I would like – this sounds very pompous but I want you to accept it in the best possible way – I want to free the Jews from Zionism, in the sense that many Jews and non-Jews accept this equation, that Zionism equals Jew. Since *Perdition* time and time again, people who are not stupid, but who have just accepted things, have said to me, "well what is Zionism? I thought that it was Jewish." And this, of course, is terrible for the Jews because every time Menachem

Begin talked about blood libels and dropped bombs on some camp, it was the Jews in Manchester, in Leeds and London and New York who paid the price for this. It generated antisemitism. This is one reaction. The second reaction is to reappraise Zionist history – to open the books, not to take these things for granted, not to listen to the Gilberts, but to see for themselves what happened.

JS: How do you see the main distinctions between antisemitism and anti-Zionism?

JA: The distinction is found by defining in a scientific sense what Zionism represents and its origins in this petty bourgeois strata. Once you have defined it and placed Zionism within the context of its role within capitalism, you look at it in relation to the Jewish working class and you say this cannot possibly resolve any of your problems.

JS: Why then do you think many Jewish people today are attached to Zionism?

JA: The holocaust lives on and the tremendous scars of what happened to the Jewish people. A lot of them wear the state of Israel like a feather in their cap. It's an anchor. It's something, an achievement, even if they've no intention of going there. It gives them something. But something they haven't really examined, because the most dangerous place of earth for a Jew now is in the Middle East.

JS: In retrospect, given the reaction to *Perdition*, how can you encourage Jews to question Zionism?

JA: The first thing is to get the play staged and published, to sweep aside all the insults and this middle class hysteria emanating from people like Gilbert, and then get the debate going.

JS: Given that fascism came to power on the massive defeat of the left, of the workers movement, isn't that a more significant subject to focus on than the reaction of powerless Jewish minorities?

JA: Before we did *United Kingdom* and after we did *The Spongers*, Roland Joffe and I decided to do four definitive films on the rise of fascism, to take it right to its basic cell. We went to East Berlin and we walked and talked to people, and I made notes, and then it was pulled, we weren't allowed to do it. So yes, that is something that has to be written. I tried and I couldn't get the funding from the BBC. The big issue which I never stop talking about, and everyone who is a socialist must keep talking about, is this danger, and of course, we know, because some of us have lived through the experience, that as capitalism continues its decline and decay then the possibility of fascism is permanent because fascism is part of the decay. You ask about why I focus on the Jews, well I've got to focus somewhere. The Jewish question for my generation was

central. The way we divided the men from the boys was the position you took on the Jewish question. Just as today if you go into a pub, and somebody starts telling jokes about "niggers" then you either laugh along with them and become an accessory, and drift into reaction yourself, when people said "the Jews, the Jews" – down the pit, or on a building site – you had to defend your corner. And in a much more severe way, I was very much involved when Mosley made his last barnstorm in Manchester. A group of us set up an anti-fascist committee. So it has always been part of my political life and then came the Lebanon, Menachem Begin, and I thought what the hell's going on here?

And then I began to open the books.

JS: How do you see antisemitism in Britain today?

JA: It's like somebody says to me, is there much diptheria knocking about nowadays? Is there much smallpox? And you say no and then something happens and meningitis sweeps the country and you think, Christ, I thought we cured that. Fascism is there beneath the surface, to be utilised and exploited, if and when the people who make these decisions let the dogs loose. I've not the slightest doubt that if we start getting 6 million unemployed you can only keep them quiet at the point of a bayonet. I can see the man on the big white horse – I thought at one time it could have

been Prince Philip! – but in such a regime the Jews and the blacks are there to be exploited. And I'll tell you this – although the blacks get the publicity and they are the ones that seem to be getting the knuckle, on the fascist agenda the Jews still come at the top. In their racist image the black is the proletariat and the Jew is still the governor. It is still the "Protocols of the Elders" interpretation of history. It's there to be tapped, it's there to be used. The tap can be turned. You open a few soup kitchens, you get a few bans, invent a few scare stories, get a few mobs on the streets and they're in business. The money is there, the opportunity is there. It is just that the guy with the whistle hasn't yet blown it.

RAISING THE CURTAIN ON HISTORY

Whose interests are served by the banning of *Perdition*? asks David Rosenberg

It must be every playwright's dream to have their work written about day after day in the press, but for renowned socialist playwright, Jim Allen, author of the controversial play, *Perdition*, it turned into a nightmare as the play on everybody's lips was called off hours before the first press preview and has yet to be publicly performed. That didn't stop people having an opinion on it, though, as the real drama was acted out not on the stage but in the press.

People who had never been near the script (and some, one suspects, had never been near a theatre) were authoritatively condemning or praising *Perdition*, while others, on the play's minimal pre-publicity – which was either clumsy or provocative, depending on how you look at it – were marshalling their troops for an angry picket of the play they had not read.

Those privileged to see the script at its earliest stage, with its central motif of Nazi-Zionist collaboration, might suggest that an angry public reaction would be entirely justified. Certainly strong accusations of antisemitism were made. But these were met by vigorous denials and counter accusations of Zionist political pressure, which in the paranoid parlance of *Perdition*'s director, Ken Loach, increasingly took the form of classic fantasies of Jewish conspiracy – fantasies more commonly associated with fascists. Reminder: this was supposed to be an anti-fascist play.

And so the battle lines were drawn with one side screaming "antisemite" and the other screaming "Zionist". Those who, in the absence of crucial information (ie the script) were unwilling to see it as so clear-cut, and who believe that even if the play was antisemitic it would merit a more sophisticated and sustained critique than merely shouting "anti-

semitic", were left on the sidelines.

Meanwhile the Royal Court theatre's "press office" – about as helpful as the DHSS on a bad day – did their worst to fuel the difficult situation. When *Jewish Socialist* first called for a press preview ticket, we were told these had all been allocated. We followed with requests for a copy of the script (all before the play was called off). They told us there was no script available. The correspondence in the *Guardian* soon afterwards suggested that there were at least two scripts! When we called two weeks later to ask again they said we should have called two weeks ago and they did not have a script available. Putting it to them that we had no option but to base our coverage on the unsatisfactory and contradictory *Guardian* letters, and to explain this to our readers, brought the reply: "Are you trying to blackmail us?" Their press office has not even bothered to reply to a subsequent letter.

So how and why was the play called off? Max Stafford-Clark, artistic director of the Royal Court, claims it was his own, unpressured, decision: he lost confidence in the play's credibility. Jim Allen and Ken Loach had a simpler explanation which saw the theatre caving in to the "powerful Zionist lobby", dubbing everyone with misgivings about *Perdition* a politically motivated Zionist. The Jewish establishment tried to have it both ways, denying any "Zionist lobbying" while claiming it was a "victory for commonsense" brought about "unshamedly" by "Jewish pressure".

The only place you will find a "powerful Zionist lobby" is in the internal politics of the Jewish community where pressure is applied to sack editors expressing independent views and to deny press space and communal facilities to

opposing groups; where false propaganda is spread and people bludgeoned into line. In the wider world, this lobby is tiny and of minimal influence, and exists only in the minds of antisemites, the politically naive and, ironically, in the equally tiny minds of the Jewish establishment. The latter thinks of, and portrays itself, as bigger, cleverer and more important than it is, but it is a paper tiger operating by bluff, and can only succeed when people fall for the bluff or when its interests coincide with those it seeks to influence.

I suspect the Royal Court's decision was partly due to falling for the bluff in panic, and partly due to genuine concern about aspects of the play. But the autocratic way in which it was cancelled meant that debate on the issues raised through *Perdition* collapsed into a debate about censorship in which some people usually vehemently opposed to "no platform" politics decided this was an exception, while others committed to "no platform" for racism and fascism slipped curiously into liberal free-speech arguments.

I have argued elsewhere (*Chartist* 111) that "no platform" is an important weapon against racism and fascism but that it must be used with discretion and care. On a delicate balance, I feel *Perdition* should have played, and had it done so, it would have been harder for the "debate" to polarise between dogmatic Zionists and equally dogmatic anti-Zionists, and would have allowed more room for sophisticated critiques from Jewish and socialist perspectives. But the vehement demands for or against censorship were just an outlet for people's excitability on the matter. Much deeper issues sparked that excitability – issues which the Left press, in its pitiful coverage of the affair,

failed to address. Those that did cover it (with the exception of the *New Statesman*) basically argued that a socialist playwright had his play called off, therefore socialists should support the play going on. Accusations of antisemitism against *Perdition* were not taken seriously and were dealt with simply by wheeling out Jim Allen's general anti-racist, anti-fascist credentials. In a sense this reaction was predictable. It was a passing issue that came and went — not worth spending much time over. But the Jewish community has to continue living with the issues, and if socialists are serious about the long-term struggles around antisemitism, fascism and Zionism, then they must continue living with the issues too.

The most important questions that arise from the *Perdition* affair are about the limits of acceptable critiques of Zionism, and how socialists should broach issues that are painful for Jews but which, for political reasons, the Jewish establishment try to suppress — such as how Jews *did* respond to Nazism and what the impact of the Holocaust has been on Zionism and Israeli society.

The arguments around critiques of Zionism have largely been dealt with by Roberto Sussman in the previous article where he condemns the idealist method of reading back into Zionist thought and action in the 1930s, (when Zionists were a powerless and beleaguered minority), from the reality of Israel today — a state with power. Here it is worth recalling socialist critiques of Zionism *before* the Holocaust. Far from portraying Zionism as an evil and powerful conspiracy, willing to sacrifice anything and anyone for its State goals, Zionism was more soberly attacked as a bourgeois, nationalist ideology — a diversion, of limited use for the Jewish masses. One of *Perdition's* fiercest critics, Stephen Roth, director of the Institute of Jewish Affairs, describes *Perdition* as "violent anti-Zionism on Trotskyist lines". It would do him good — and some socialists and Trotskyist today — to read Trotsky's critiques of Zionism, which, as the Marxist scholar David Hillel Ruben has shown, are "made in the spirit of sadness that Zionism holds out such false hopes for the solution to the sufferings of a people."

A materialist analysis of Zionism in this period offers deeper insights and shows just how crude, offensive and off-target are the accusations of Zionist-Nazi collaboration. When fascism gripped Europe, Zionists, both "Left" and "Right", were a minority within the largest Jewish communities. Most Jews put their faith in anti-Zionist parties, especially the Bund who had a superior record on Jewish defence throughout the

1930s. At an international political level too, Zionism, limited by its narrow outlook and social base, was ineffective and acquiescent — nothing more or less sinister than that. Faced directly by the Nazi extermination machine in the ghettos, people inspired by Zionism displayed various responses from the bravery of physical resistance and self-sacrifice to the wheeling and dealing of self-preservation. People are never prisoners of pure ideology and many factors determined their individual and collective responses.

The Nazis wanted to be rid of the Jews and Zionists wanted Jews to go — to Palestine, but for the Nazis, expulsion was a euphemism whose full meaning was translated in the gas chambers in which they annihilated the Jews. Had the Nazi armies reached Palestine, Jews there would have shared no less than fate of their sisters and brothers in Europe.

Let's be clear — all Jews, whether Zionist or not, were the prime targets and victims of Nazism. And they were sacrificed not for the many shortcomings and inadequacies of their own relatively powerless bourgeois leaderships (both pro- and anti-Zionist, but because the powerful international workers movement failed to defeat fascism, when fascism was called upon to rescue capitalism from its massive crisis in the 1930s. Perhaps when socialist playwrights have spent more time analysing and dramatising that failure, they will receive a more positive welcome from Jews when they focus on the response of the desperate minority most thoroughly sacrificed for that failure.

Of course we must ask questions about the Jewish response to Nazism. And we must challenge entrenched Jewish interests which try to suppress these questions by falsely labelling them "antisemitic" or dodge them with bland renderings of Zionist historiography that are more concerned with justifying whatever Israel does than with understanding the Holocaust. These questions have distinct relevance and parallels today. What was the role of the Argentinian Jewish establishment during the years of the Junta when thousands of political oppositionists, including many Jews, were "disappearing" while Israel sold its weaponry to that Junta? What is the role of the "official" Jewish leadership in South Africa today, and what are the consequences of Israel's continuing collaboration with Pretoria? But the important thing is how these historical and contemporary questions are asked, and for what purpose. We should welcome and encourage genuine and sympathetic enquiry to explore, and judge, Jewish

responses to fascism and authoritarianism. But *Perdition* exploits and plays on the horrors suffered by Jews at the hands of fascism, as an instrument of another struggle in a separate context — a struggle against Zionism.

Jim Allen is not alone here. His Zionist counterparts also exploit the Holocaust for contemporary political purposes. At their most dishonest, Zionist ideologues portray Israel's "defence" forces as direct heirs of resisters in the ghettos, obscenely placing their brutality against Palestinians and their defence of state nationalism on the same moral plane as resistance to fascism. For Jim Allen, Israel's leaders are direct heirs of those he terms Zionism's wartime "collaborators". Both contribute to a mythologising about the Holocaust that distorts it into historical straight-jackets and plays into the hands of those who wish to wipe it out of history altogether. As a founder member of Manchester Anti-Fascist Committee, Jim Allen surely knows how much energy fascist groups today devote to denying the Holocaust and why they consider it so important. When there is a patent need to educate a new generation about the nature and consequences of fascism, the sweeping accusation of collaboration at the centre of his play mystifies the roots of the Holocaust and diminishes Nazi responsibility for it.

If his prime purpose is to discredit Zionism, then he has gone about it in a dangerously wrong manner. It is not as if there is a shortage of material in the reality of Israel today, the aftermath of the Lebanon war and the continuing oppression and denial of rights to the Palestinians. The consequences of Zionism for Israelis, Palestinians and diaspora Jews must be exposed and challenged but in their material reality and not as ahistorical, crude and conspiratorial ideological fantasy.

At the end of the day the dogmatists and purists on either side of the Zionist/anti-Zionist divide are the only winners. Those who wrongly believe, or affect to believe, that all opposition to Zionism is antisemitism and their opposite numbers who think that all that remains between people and "historical truth" is a powerful and dangerous "Zionist lobby" will not have been shaken in their beliefs by the events of the last few weeks. And as a result of *Perdition* and the predictable response it generated and provoked, those of us who genuinely and critically want to dig deeper into Jewish and socialist responses to fascism, and the historic role of Zionism, to foster public debate on these issues in order to learn lessons for today, will find the going that much harder. □

SHOAH — screen memory

In the first of three articles on Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*, Ralph Levinson describes its emotional impact.

My sister has a framed photograph on the wall of her room. A pious Jew, in *tallis* and *tefilin*, prays before he is shot by a group of grinning Nazis. A pile of bodies lie at his feet. The photograph is a reminder for her. I turn it to the wall when I visit. I prefer to forget.

I have a difficulty facing up to the Holocaust and, I suspect, it is not unique. Since we lost relatives in our family, I grew up in its shadow. The victims were martyrs. There seems to be a convention for remembering martyrs. It is to tread reverentially in their memory. I heard the invocation "You Must Not Forget" not just from home, but from the Jewish community as a whole. I could not feel grief for people who had suffered in an event that was surrounded by mystique, at a time before I was born.

I suggest three reasons for this. In some cases the Holocaust had become a property. One example was the way people like Begin bludgeoned diaspora Jewry with the words: "Israel shall not let it happen again." This was not a reference to antisemitism in Eastern Europe. It was a stick to beat the Palestinians. He had incorporated the Holocaust as part of an ideology. If you questioned the ideology you laid yourself open to attacking the memory of six million Jews.

When I came to study the causes of the War, the killings were always presented in context. The Holocaust was the culmination of runaway inflation, central European chauvinism and German grievances over the Treaty of Versailles. All so nicely sanitized. Explain the causes and the effects seemed to follow as a natural consequence. Since those factors had disappeared or changed in nature, then, the textbooks and the media seemed to say, the Holocaust becomes an irrelevance.

The final reason points to the techniques used to record the Holocaust and the terms that shroud the victims. The photographs and film give the impression of Jews being led like lambs to the slaughter. I remember, particularly, the photograph of the Nazis leading the Jews out of the Warsaw Ghetto and the film of the emaciated survivors after the camps were captured. These pictures bestow a vivid feeling of suffering but, ultimately, leave us helpless. They reinforce the idea of martyrdom and obstruct our coming to terms with their plight as human beings — the decisions *they* had to take, the agonies *they* suffered, *their* attitudes and feelings towards their fate.

Recreating the past

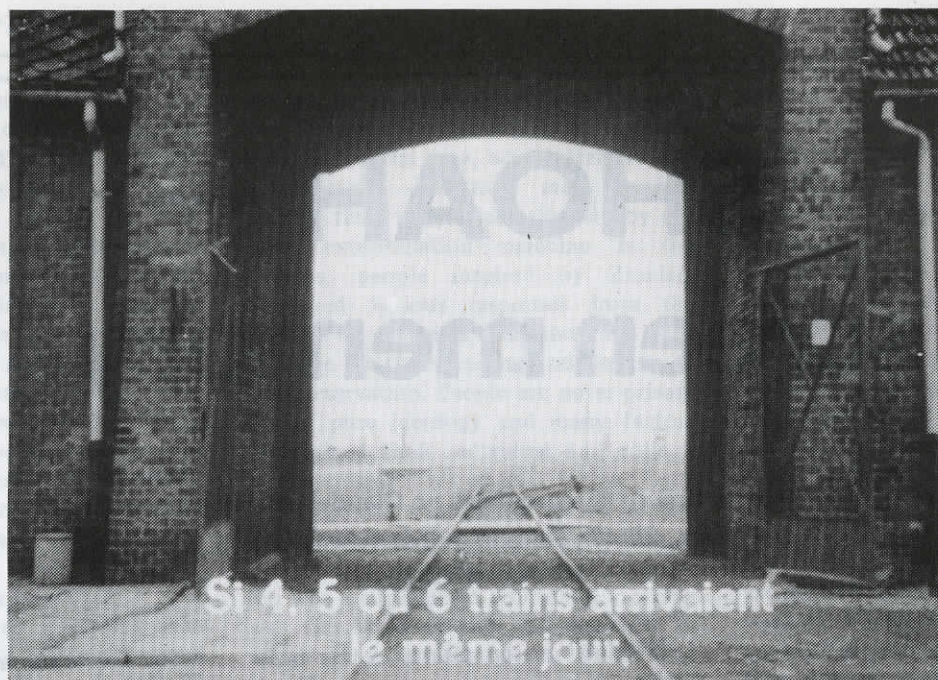
What new perspective, then, could a 9½ hour film provide? What questions would it ask that had not been asked many times before? I knew that Lanzmann had spent 12 years working on *Shoah*. Surely, no one would devote that energy without shedding fresh light on that period.

The structure and form of *Shoah* is unique. There is no footage of the Past. The Present becomes the Past through the act of memory. We see the effect the death camps had on the victims and survivors through the persistent and detailed questioning. Lanzmann's view is uncompromising. The survivors have to recall everything, however painful, and as they do so their experiences transcend the causality of history. The audience interacts with the telling. The Reality is revealed there, in the cinema, pressing on you, not to judge but to live with the stark experiences they uncover.

The events are recreated in a variety of places: a barber's shop, the grounds of a death camp, a New York apartment, a Swiss restaurant, a kibbutz, a cobbler's shop in Corfu. The account takes the form of an archaeological investigation. The surfaces of the material are ripped away, the metaphorical bones dug up, and, only then, can the bits come together and the bones be refleshed.

Train drivers, station masters, Polish peasants, camp commandants (some were paid large sums of money to take part and were filmed surreptitiously), survivors, all take part in the reconstruction. The camera returns us, again and again, to the railway station at Treblinka, the sites of the gas chambers, the railway line that passes through the gateway of Auschwitz. Lanzmann asks about train timetables; the details of the gassings; the precise distance from the platform to the living quarters at Treblinka; the routes by which the victims had to run to their deaths. Even as we begin to conceive of the reality, the nature of the military-industrial complex materialises. A large bureaucracy had to handle the papers and co-ordinate the details of death.

Sometimes the attention to detail appears absurd. A camp inmate recalls how the flames from burning bodies reached to the sky. "To the sky?" Lanzmann queries. "To the sky", he confirms. There is a question about the colour of a door of a mobile gas chamber. Seemingly innocuous questions, but they serve the purpose. The Holocaust *is* because we know the details of how it takes place. The questions are also disarming because their insignificance leads to other feelings and recollections interlocked with the first trivial detail.



Fine detail

The individual who stirred me most was a Czech Jew, Filip Muller. We know why he was used as a slave labourer. As an elderly man telling us what he observed we see that Muller has a powerful physique. He has the most extraordinary memory. His tone is precise, objective as if he is describing the fine details of a Roman tomb. He is the intermediary between us and the gas chambers but he does not get in the way. Occasionally, he allows himself a simile. When he opens the doors of the gas chambers to clear out the bodies, he finds them "packed like slabs." His voice remains even. He tells how he saw a group of Czech Jews waiting to be gassed. "At that point my life became meaningless," he says, and, for the first time, he breaks down. He goes to join them, to end it all, but they urge him to remain alive as a witness.

There are many scenes in *Shoah* that leave an indelible mark. I cannot forget the barber, interviewed in his shop in Tel Aviv, describing how he shaved people before they were gassed. He relates all this as a client sits motionless on the barber's chair, a cloth around his neck as though he was being prepared for execution.

The Resistance fighter from the Warsaw Ghetto describes the geography of the Ghetto. I felt I knew it better than if I had a map and photographs. He tells how he emerges from the Ghetto into the streets of Gentile Warsaw, and his amazement at the normality of life there. And his comrade standing by him in the kibbutz, scarred and taciturn, who says only: "If you could lick my heart it would poison you."

Ambivalent attitudes

One witness troubled me. This was Jan Karski, the Pole who represented the government-in-exile, now interviewed in his American home. I found something unsettling about his attitude. Karski relates how a Bundist leader comes to him and insists on taking him to the Ghetto. Karski is impressed with this man. The Bundist looks like a "real Polish nobleman", dignified and intelligent. Implicit in this description is that these qualities are unusual for a Jew. Karski goes along with the Bundist and is clearly shocked by the tragic circumstances of the Ghetto. He is a decent man, unlike the unspeakable Nazi deputy commissioner, but he leaves a lot unsaid. Did he spread the dreadful situation of the Jews to the Allied governments as he was asked? He clearly had reservations about this task. What was his attitude towards the Jews? Lanzmann exposes the antisemitism of the Polish peasantry. I found it strange that he does not take the opportunity to examine the attitude of a bourgeois urbanite. After all the Ghetto was in Warsaw.

Few women appear in the film. A couple of women survivors do have an opportunity to tell us of their experiences but they are almost completely edited out. The camps did affect men and women in different ways. They were separated. They were assigned different tasks but the Women's experience is almost completely ignored.

The process of the film presupposes the decisions Lanzmann made with editing and the people he chose to appear. What were his reasons for choosing one individual over another? Clearly he cannot

include all the footage but it would be interesting to know of the decisions on selection that he took.

The film had one major fault: its attitude towards the Poles. In the first part of *Shoah* there are lengthy interviews with peasants. A survivor is taken to an Easter service in a small town, and outside the church he is introduced to the townspeople who remember him in the camps as a little boy. They are pleased to see him but, gradually, the old antisemitic attitudes emerge, and the survivor listens to them grinning helplessly. I felt this section served no purpose. It was humiliating and uncomfortable to watch. Sure, they were antisemitic but they wield no power. Lanzmann seemed to suggest that Poland was a suitable place for the camps because of this rampant and universal antisemitism. But the Poles are a complex people and it is misleading to suggest that they all harboured similar feelings or that the nature of the antisemitism was the same throughout the country.

There is a problem defining *Shoah* as a film. A film transcribes reality into a series of images. The artificiality of a frame, a screen, a camera recording selected details, lighting and set designs contribute towards the unreal nature of film. In a paradoxical manner *Shoah* does the opposite. It takes the Holocaust, shrouded in mystique, and exposes it. After 9½ hours I felt my attitudes towards, and my consciousness of, the Holocaust had changed. I had insight into its mechanism, I knew about that terrible violence and, through the film, I had my own experience of it.

LEST WE FORGET

Points Critiques, a Belgian Jewish magazine brought together sixth form students at a Catholic secondary school in Brussels who had been to see *Shoah* as part of their French studies. Robert and Thierry are 17, Luigi and Fabien, 18, Ramon and Javier, 19 and Catherine, 20. Only after recording the interview, did Elie Gross tell them that it would appear in a Jewish magazine.

Would you have gone to see *Shoah* if it hadn't been through school?

Ramon I don't think so. I think I know enough about the subject. There has been a lot about it on television.

Catherine I might have gone to see it because there has been a lot of talk about the way it was made, and how the interviews were really good. I hadn't heard that much about the content of the film.

Were you surprised at the way in which this film was made?

Catherine Yes. It's quite special for a war film to be based purely on interviews with former prisoners or former German officers. And when they do exist, it's very rare for them to be done in the way that they are in *Shoah*.

What do you find particularly striking about these interviews?

Ramon I had the impression that Claude Lanzmann made people say what he wanted them to say. He knew how to lead them on. He wasn't at all neutral. *Catherine* I agree generally with Ramon, but I think it depended on who he was talking to. When he was questioning Poles who live in houses that used to belong to Jews, he arranged it so they would say that they rejected Jews in general.

Did he try to make them say things they didn't mean?

Luigi You felt that they were talking in general terms rather than in personal terms.

Fabien The facts of history are now known and you were expecting people's answers. Luigi says Claude Lanzmann wanted to make people say things they hadn't thought at the start, but I think that at the end of the day the Poles were against the Jews because they were not Christians. There should be some sort of sympathy for those who suffer and get killed, even if they are your worst enemy. You still have pity. But they didn't.

I was surprised by the kind of film it was. If it had been a well-made documen-

tary, I would not have minded. But I think it's a pity to turn the knife in the wound. Again... everything that's happened with reference to Jews had been forgotten and now it's brought up again in people's minds. It's a bit sad. Some people would have forgotten about all that and going to see the film brought the period back to them. It's a pity.

Do you think it's something that should be forgotten?

Fabien Yes, it should be forgotten. It did so much harm that the best thing to do is forget it. People say you mustn't forget because it could all start again some day. OK, but that's got nothing to do with us; it applies to the high-ups in society.

Catherine In one sense I agree with you when you say that we should perhaps talk less about it. This type of film gives rise to two different attitudes. The first is to be utterly nauseated; the second is that because you've heard so much about it, you end up becoming tired of the whole thing. Personally when I go to see a film like that I come out even more nauseated than I was when I went in, but it could give some people ideas...

What sort of ideas?

Catherine A film like that can bring Hitlerian fanaticism back to the surface. It can revive a certain nostalgia. When the German officers are questioned and they tell how the camp was structured, how they went about things, how they managed to kill 2,000 Jews a day and things like that, a lot of old memories are brought back.

You say that you hear a lot about the genocide of the Jews and you can get fed up with it but, apart from *Shoah*, where and how have you heard about it?

Catherine From our parents or grandparents who lived through the war. Also other films about the war, books... but there is a fundamental difference. Generally these are films of fiction, where it's all heroism and action and one doesn't

spend too much time on human tragedy. This isn't fiction at all.

Fabien There's one good film which they show quite often on television. One week there were three or four films on nothing but the Jews. Even someone who was entirely on the side of the Jews and against everything the Nazis did during the war would get fed up. I think Jews want to put out propaganda for themselves and against all the massacres they have suffered, but I think there is too much of it, they destroy their own case. People get fed up. Since we were small we have been told about it because it is one of the major events of this century. We will be told about it for the rest of our lives.

Luigi You talk about being "fed up", but that's only how it is for you, it isn't for Jewish families who survived and for whom it is etched in their minds.

Fabien Precisely. Perhaps Jewish families want to forget about all these massacres and not hear anything else about it because it brings back terrible memories. If it's forgotten, people can make a new life for themselves and that's that. It's good to remember the past, but I don't think you should still live with and talk about something so horrible 40 years later. Do we still talk about 1815 and the thousands of people who died? Do English and French families still care about it? No. I think Jews are trying to put themselves on a pedestal and that's a pity. They've been persecuted since they were created. It's in their scriptures. They will be persecuted until the end of their days. *Luigi* You talk like the clergyman interviewed in the film. "It's their destiny to be persecuted. Full stop."

Fabien Perhaps they ask for it...

Robert I would like to come in here, seeing that I come from a Jewish family. With reference to "forgetting" there are two things to bear in mind. First, there is no way it *can* be forgotten; secondly it *should* not be forgotten because it must not happen again. The main thing is that it *cannot* be forgotten. As far as the film

itself is concerned, I didn't rush out to see it because I thought there would be too much archive material. I've learned enough listening to my grandparents who managed to escape death and who saw. . .

Fabien, you say that it is something that should be forgotten. Do you think Jews whose families were killed just because they were Jews can forget?

Fabien It should stay among Jews, then.

Don't you think that if we forget history, we are in danger of changing it?

Fabien Perhaps it is possible to change history just talking about it, but there is archive material that cannot be denied and which remains in the vaults. If one day there is a sudden upsurge of fascism, you can always go and get them out and show people the truth, so it can be stamped out at once.

Ramon Still, it would be better to foresee it than to show these images when it is too late, wouldn't it?

What most impressed you about Shoah?

Ramon I could see that this film was trying, not just to describe the killing, but also to understand why the Jews were persecuted. How could it have happened?

Catherine Above all, how the Poles could have remained indifferent to what was going on before their very eyes. How they could get used to not facing up to the cries, the corpses. . .

Fabien The scenery. I knew the facts already, more or less, but the scenery. . . The images of the camps, the fact that the Germans planted fir trees at the end of the war so no one would notice anything, the sites of the huts, the stations which were there, the trains. . .

After seeing the film, did you find yourself asking questions about your families' attitudes during the war?

Ramon I didn't ask myself questions about my family but about myself. I asked myself if, at the end of the day, I wouldn't have had exactly the same attitude as the Poles.

How do you mean?

Ramon Stayed neutral.

Catherine You must be able to put yourself in their place. In the film a Pole makes a very good reply. He says he knew that Jews were being sent to their death but he had a family to feed and. . . he chose his family.

You haven't said anything. What happened to you when you left the cinema?

Thierry Well, I ran along to catch my train (laughter).

Didn't you ask yourself any questions? Was it as if you had seen a comedy film?

Thierry No. But the film left me cold. It wasn't badly made but it grated on me. After two hours I left.

Javier What got me was how different Poles reacted. You felt the train driver was still all upset, but as for the country folk living near the camps. . . The Poles themselves seemed to blame the Jews for everything. "Our problems are due to the Jews." They didn't pass the blame on to the Germans. There was a lack of information. They fell into a trap set by the Germans. □

This interview first appeared in issue 26 (November 1986) of Points Critiques, magazine of the Union of Progressive Jews of Belgium. It was translated from French by Michael Heiser. Points Critiques is available from UPJB, 61 Rue de la Victoire, 1060 Bruxelles, Belgium. Issue 26 contains an extensive coverage of Shoah.

Icon of suffering

Michael Heiser looks at the political lessons of Shoah.

The response to *Shoah* in Britain has been muted. The reviewer in *City Limits*, London's left-leaning listings magazine, complained that its 9½ hours would deter audiences. Lanzmann faced this line of criticism with, "I think the film is extremely fast."

Shoah is, in brief, a series of interviews about the Nazi extermination of the Jews in Europe; interviews with survivors, witnesses and perpetrators; Jews, Poles and Germans. No archive material or stills are used; all the footage is contemporary. Lanzmann's camera takes us to the stunning landscapes of Eastern Poland, around the death camps of Treblinka and Sobibor. We are taken along the single railway track through the quiet woods of Treblinka. We find ourselves in the snow-covered remains of the crematorium at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Detail follows detail. Lanzmann told how he felt a compulsion to retrace in detail with the exact number of trains per day; the exact routine on the way to the gas chamber. A barber, cutting hair in his Tel Aviv barbershop, tells how he was forced to perform the same task at Treblinka just prior to the gassing of Jews. An elder of the Corfu community tells how Jews were rounded up and sent on their long journey across Europe. The German railway official who timetabled this is interviewed about his "achievements".

Poles who could smell and hear the fires of the crematorium still work the same fields. Peasants show how they indi-

cated to Jews in the transports their certain end; a forefinger drawn across the throat. Train drivers still run trains on the same lines. And then on to the Warsaw Ghetto; a Polish official tells how a Bundist leader took him on a visit to the ghetto and we hear from the Nazi assistant to the commissioner in Warsaw. And finally "Kajik", a Jewish underground fighter speaking (in Kibbutz Lohamei Haghettaot, the Kibbutz of the Ghetto fighters) about his experience coming out of the bunker after the ghetto had burned to the ground: "I am the last Jew. I shall wait for the morning. I shall wait for the Germans."

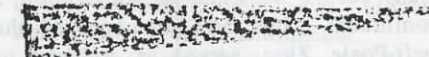
Modern-day Warsaw, a housing estate with anonymous blocks of flats which could as well be in Tottenham or Tokyo gives way to the final image, the train lumbering on the track, towards Auschwitz or Treblinka. According to Lanzmann: "In some ways the film never stops; the end of the film is a rolling train."

How are we to interpret *Shoah*? Lanzmann deliberately eschews a chronological approach. In a preface to the film he explains how he has reacted against conventional cinema treatments of the Holocaust which start in 1933 or before and then proceed, "almost harmoniously, so to speak," to the extermination camps. Extermination cannot be put in its context. It demands, as it were, an ahistorical or suprahistorical treatment.

It is worth pausing a moment to consider to what extent this "conventional" view has come to dominate the way we look at the Holocaust. From the rise of Hitler: the repression of the trade unions; socialists and communists; the Church; the French; the Dutch; the Poles. Pastor Martin Niemöller's famous statement, "When they came for me, there was no one to stand up for me," symbolises this approach. We were all affected by the Nazis; after all look at the bombing of Coventry or London.

One advantage of this way of looking at things is that there is an obvious and compelling pointer to contemporary political action: that of unity against racism and fascism. If "we" all suffered the same, it is in "our" interest to unite so it should not happen again, whether "we" are British or Dutch or Polish or Jewish or a Gypsy, or German socialists, feminists or democrats. The famous pictures of Belsen or Auschwitz became an icon of the Holocaust to represent the suffering of all.

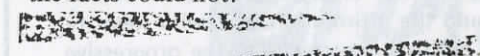
How can we question this? Should we question it? Does questioning risk sabotaging unity, playing into the hands of those who do not support such unity?



Perhaps. But if we build our unity on a misrepresentation of history, concealing uncomfortable truths, will that unity stand up when tested?

Of all the groups that suffered under the Nazis, only the Jews and the Gypsies were the subjects of a systematic programme of extermination, as opposed to persecution; sent to death camps, as opposed to concentration camps. It would have been good if *Shoah* had made the point about Gypsies. As it does not, any critique should make it. Uncomfortably, not all were treated alike. This point is made starkly in the film by Rudolf Vrba, a survivor of the anti-Nazi underground in Auschwitz. He tells how the (non-Jewish) "political" prisoners found that by resisting the Nazis they could prolong their own life and improve their own conditions. But the result of this was that there were fewer "vacancies" for places in the slave labour force. The vacancies would have been filled by Jews destined for the gas chamber; they would thus have been saved from immediate death. Vrba tells how he overheard a conversation between an SS doctor and a member of the SS in charge of the concentration camp. The doctor: "Why don't you take them? These are Jews, fed on the fat of Dutch cheese. They are perfect for the Camp." And Hauptscharführer Fries replied: "I can't take them because today they aren't dying fast enough in the camp." There was a direct trade-off. If 5,000 died, they were replaced with 5,000 Jews. If 1,000, only 1,000.

The Poles suffered terrible privation in the War, but today there is an ethnically homogenous Polish nation. Ninety percent of Polish Jewry was exterminated. *Shoah* brings this home in a way that statistic cannot, and a chronological recitation of the facts could not.



The film is not cathartic. At the end of nine hours one does not leave the cinema feeling chastened and more noble. We are all living the aftermath of the Holocaust. You cannot shut it out or consign it to the realms of fiction or buried history, like Hamlet's Denmark or Lear's Britain. But it begs, urgently, the question of how we deal with our inheritance. The Holocaust can be and has been used by Jews to stifle debate. I have seen this happening, in very different contexts with Black people and with Palestinians. In each case the conflict became reduced to two angry sets of people facing each other with their own history of trauma and defeat, persecution and resistance.

Lanzmann again: "The specificity of the crime is its importance. The Gulag is the Gulag; as far as I know they didn't gas children. You cannot compare the Holocaust with others' genocides." By implication this should apply to deliberate use of Holocaust imagery in the context of the Middle East, like Begin comparing Arafat to Hitler.

I am sure that Lanzmann is right to react against the equation of one evil with another, which blurs the clarity of detail and can easily lead to a trivialisation of history so that the sufferings of one people appear to become an adjunct to those of another. The horror of the Holocaust lies not in the manifestation of some universal evil but in Lanzmann's minute detail.

But to refuse any applicability of the lessons of the Holocaust to other times and other peoples is to disable ourselves politically, to prevent ourselves from learning the lessons of history. If, as Lanzmann says, the film is still continuing in a sense, we have to show how and that it applies not just to Jews, Germans or Poles. I will point to one lesson that seems applicable to the Left. The Left does not often discuss the Holocaust, or if it does it is within the "conventional" framework. *Shoah* itself has not received much attention in Left papers or in discussion on the Left. (Compare this to discussion over the play *Perdition*, where everyone could discuss with a will whether or not the victims colluded in their extermination.) Perhaps the Left can start off by placing itself in the position of the Poles; subject to oppression but containing within it a minority which was subject to persecution and ultimately to extermination.

I remember some years ago talking to a trade union convenor at a local factory. I asked whether the union had taken up complaints of racism made by Black workers. "With this management," he said, "we are all under pressure fighting redundancies; they affect black and white." As a minority within the Left, we fight the battles of the Left, but we insist that the Left is aware of and fights against our specific oppression. That is the lesson. It doesn't just apply to Jews.

Shoah will be shown later this year on Channel Four. How many people will watch it? How will it be seen in retrospect? As an essential tool in understanding relations between majority and minority groups, or as an indulgence, a beached whale, an angst-ridden expression of survivors' guilt? I hope it is the former. But I wish I was confident it will not be the latter. □

The most enduring image from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is the famous photograph, so often used in anti-fascist literature, of a young child emerging from a bunker with other Jews, all closely watched by Nazis holding machine guns. From these bunkers the ZOB ((Zydowska Organizacja Bowoja – Jewish Fighters' Organisation) denied victory to the Nazi forces of SS General Jurgen Stroup for over three weeks, being finally defeated only after the Nazis resorted to fire to destroy the Ghetto utterly. This organised military engagement began on April 19th 1943, the first night of Pesach. But large-scale cultural or non-violent resistance had begun many years earlier.

CULTURAL RESISTANCE IN THE GHETTO

After the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, they began to experiment with ghettos. These twentieth century experiments with a medieval institution served to concentrate and isolate Jews so that none would escape the ever-tightening mesh of German control. On May 1st 1940 the Lodz Ghetto was sealed off. In Warsaw the ghetto walls began to be constructed in the summer of 1940. By November 1940 nearly half a million Jews were enclosed and locked within its gates.

Vladke Meed, who served as a courier between Jews and the Warsaw Ghetto and non-Jews in Warsaw and its environs has written that "I am deeply convinced that if it had not been for the massive (psychological and spiritual) resistance, the armed resistance could never have happened." This spiritual resistance took

many forms. Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, a communal leader and members of the Left-Poale Zion, served as archivist to the Warsaw Ghetto and managed to escape into Gentile Warsaw. Writing in March 1944, a week before his discovery and murder by the Gestapo, he outlined the cultural resistance: "...Under the cloak of the children's kitchen and homes of CENTOS (Central Organisation for the Protection of Children and Orphans) a net of underground schools was spread... The secular schools using Yiddish as the language of instruction was particularly active... Lively underground educational activities were conducted by almost all parties and ideological groups, particularly youth organisations... An especially stimulating press was maintained by the following organisations: Bund, Left-Wing Poale-Zion, Hashomer Hatzair, Dror, Right-Wing Poale-Zion, Anti-Fascist Bloc, Communists and others... A central library for children was organised... a theatre... a symphony orchestra... Jewish artists and sculptors, living in extreme poverty, occasionally prepared exhibitions."

These non-violent resistance activities relied on the essential humanity of people – only with hindsight do we realise the consequences of this misplaced faith in the decency of the Nazis. The Jews of the Ghetto were slow to relinquish this faith. In September 1942, first hand reports from escaped gravediggers forced the shocking truth about the destination of the transports from Warsaw upon the remaining Jews. Dr. Ringelblum noted in his diary: "The populace wants to extract a high price from the enemy... We will attack them

UPRISING!

Stephen Ogin tells the story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

with whatever weapons are available – with knives, with clubs, with acid – to prevent blockades and roundups, now that we are certain that the so-called labour camps are actually death camps..."

THE UPRISING

By the beginning of 1943, the original half million inhabitants of the Ghetto had been reduced to about 50,000. At Passover, on the first Seder night, the ZOB discovered that the Nazis had decreed the annihilation of the Ghetto. The Nazis had realised, as a result of armed resistance by the ZOB, that Jews could no longer be deceived into leaving voluntarily. The ZOB had made careful preparations for a sustained armed resistance. Bunkers had been dug and tunnels established. Sewer corridors and exits were built and houses equipped for a battle. Even weapons had been obtained – not for all the able-bodied, but at least for some. The ZOB advised the non-combatants in the Ghetto to move to previously prepared shelters and hide-outs. "No submission!" was the ZOB battle cry as the Nazis entered the Ghetto. "A deathly silence enveloped the Ghetto," wrote Marek Edelman, a ZOB commandant who survived the War. "The ZOB was on the alert."

There was never any doubt about the outcome. Hemmed in by the malevolent indifference of the Polish Gentiles and under attack by five thousand massively armed Nazi troops, there were at most a thousand Jewish fighters, their weaponry largely makeshift. The Jewish resistance was noteworthy because the single goal was to make the Nazis pay a heavy toll for their inevitable victory.

Tsivye Lubetkin, another combatant and survivor of the War, gave eyewitness testimony of the battle at the Eichmann trial in 1961. In the early morning of 19 April she was at her post in Nalewki Street with a group led by Zkharye Artshteyn. "The young men and women had been waiting for this moment for months, the moment when we would shoot back at the Germans... Suddenly they entered, thousands, armed and we, some twenty men and women, had a revolver, a grenade, some bombs, home-made ones that had to be lit by matches... When the Germans approached and we threw our hand grenades and saw German blood pouring over the streets of Warsaw where so much Jewish blood

had poured, we rejoiced. The future did not worry us..."

Marek Edelman describes how, after the ambush by the ZOB, the Germans attempted a retreat. "The 'glorious' SS called tanks into action... But even the tanks seemed to be affected by the Germans' bad luck. The first was burned out by one of our incendiary bottles; the rest did not approach our positions... The fate of the Germans caught in the Mila Street-Zamenhofa Street trap was settled. Not a single German left this area alive. The following battle groups took part in the fighting here: Gruzalc's (Bund), Merdek's (Hashomer), Hochberg's (Bund), Berek's (Dror) and Pawel's (PPR)..."

On the 20 April the Germans proposed a truce to enable them to remove their dead and offered safe conduct ("an orderly evacuation") to the working camps in Poniatow and Trawniki. "Firing was our answer," writes Marek Edelman. "Every house remained a hostile fortress. From every storey, from every window, bullets sought hated German helmets, hated German hearts..."

THE GHETTO BURNS

The resistance was so successful that the Nazis were finally forced to change tactics. They began to set fire to Ghetto buildings and brought in flame throwers. By 22 April the Ghetto was ablaze. The ZOB regrouped their forces and began rescuing and moving to safer areas the thousands who were being burned alive. The intense heat turned pavements into sticky areas of tar, food reserves were burnt and deep wells dug for water filled with rubble. The burning of the Ghetto destroyed the last remaining living quarters. The ZOB forces descended into the underground shelters with the non-combatants to defend whatever could still be defended. From then on the ZOB switched their tactics. In the daytime the Ghetto streets were completely lifeless. By night, armed encounters with German patrols took a heavy toll on both sides.

On the 8 May, the headquarters of the ZOB was surrounded by Germans and Ukrainians. The non-combatants in the bunker surrendered but the ZOB fighters entrenched themselves. When the Germans were convinced that they could not take the bunker by storm they tossed in a gas bomb. Rather than be taken alive, about 100 ZOB fighters killed each

other. Among them was Mordecai Anilewicz, the ZOB commander.

On the 10 May, having crawled through the slime of the Warsaw sewers, some 75 ZOB fighters climbed out of a trap-door into a street in Gentile Warsaw. The Jewish underground had organised two waiting trucks, ostensibly to move furniture. Marek Edelman noted: "... While the stunned crowd looked on, armed Jews appeared from the depth of the dark hole. At this time the very sight of a Jew was a sensational occurrence... Two battle groups remained in the Ghetto. We were in contact with them until the middle of June. From them on every trace of them disappeared..."

THE RESISTANCE CONTINUES

The surviving ZOB fighters continued the battle against the Nazis from the nearby Vishkover woods. In August 1944, when Gentile Warsaw arose in revolt, the remnants of the Ghetto organisation participated and were known as the "ZOB Group".

Armed resistance was not limited to Warsaw. Jews fought back in Bialystok, Cracow, Czestochowa, Vilna, Lachwa, Grodno, Lida, Slonim and dozens of other Eastern European towns and cities. But the Warsaw Ghetto uprising has come to symbolise the many acts of Jewish resistance in the Ghettos and death camps, both cultural and military. Mordecai Anilewicz wrote during the Uprising: "It is now clear to me that what took place exceeded all expectations. In our opposition to the Germans we did more than our strength allowed... I am happy to have been one of the first Jewish fighters in the Ghetto..."

Sources: "Life, Struggle and Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto", The Workmen's Circle, New York. "The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising", Congress for Jewish Culture, New York. "Suggested material for Ghetto memorial programs", The Workmen's Circle, New York. "The War Against the Jews 1933-45", Lucy Davidowicz, Penguin Books.

JEWISH CURRENTS

Morris U Schappes, Editor

A monthly magazine which for 40 years has brought progressive Jewish secularism to the Jewish community, and the affirmation of Jewish identity through Jewish historical, ethical and cultural experience to the progressive community

Pro-Israel though non-Zionist, we stress Jewish survival including under socialism; Jewish cultural diversity; Yiddish language and literature; Black-Jewish relations and Holocaust commemoration.

DEPARTMENTS: It Happened in Israel, Inside the Jewish Community, Around the World (with a special section on Jews in the USSR), Secularism and Our Heritage, Jewish Women Now

SOME RECENT ARTICLES: "Elie Wiesel: His Vision and Voice", by Elliot L Jurist; "A Yiddish Folksinger from the GDR", by Robin Ostow; "Jewish Israelis Seeking Accommodation with Israeli Arabs", by Jean Gordon; "The Jewish Mother and the Jewish-American Princess", by Selma Siegel.

One year \$14 Two Years: \$26 Three years: \$38

Single issue: \$1.25 plus \$1 airmail postage

JEWISH CURRENTS, Dept JS, Suite 601, 22 East 17th Street, New York, NY 10003, USA.

ווארשעווער געטא



אי פֿשטאנד

SONGS OF THE ASHES

The songs of the ashes are a testament. The songs of the ashes are a reminder. They are a comfort to those who fear tomorrow, and a support to all Jews who fear today — because, we are their echo. Sad the day when they cease, for then, so shall we.

Ghetto *lider* are a phenomenon to our present-day perceptions not merely because of their stark content, but because we have lost the capacity to sing. The success of the radio, gramophone and tape-cassette, replayable at will, has robbed us of the desire to make our own music and the wherewithal to express our personal anxieties, our observations, aspirations or joy, in music.

We have been taught that music is entertainment. "Serious" music is intellectual entertainment. How can we, who rely on the commercial media for material — either "pop" or "classical" — come to understand how natural it once was for Bundists to sing together about poverty, or about their resolve to change the world? The Spanish revolutionaries, and Mao's students sang, and in singing, felt that they were actively communicating their goals. Yesterday's TV News from Soweto showed us thousands of people "entertaining" themselves in song at a funeral. All of these, all within living memory, in the midst of tyranny and conflict, have found it natural to sing!

But, none can yet compare to the spectacle of millions of our people actually physically singing *Ani Ma'amin* ("I Believe") as they were whipped and driven into the gas ovens. Eli Weisel has described this as an act of heroism, a supreme defiance — you may destroy my body, but my spirit will survive you.

In the Ghettos, in the midst of starvation, disease and pestilence, they sang. In Treblinka and Auschwitz and Majdanek they sang. Partisans and refugees hiding in the forests — sang. When Warsaw and Vilna and Lodz trembled and burned —

The suffering and resistance of Jewish people during the holocaust was expressed through song in their common language of Yiddish. Chaim Neslen writes about these songs and their continuing resonance today.

they sang. And, when only their ashes are left — the ashes sing!

AUTHENTIC VOICE

The authentic voice of the ashes sings to us in Yiddish, much the same as the true folk memory of the destruction of the Temple is recorded in ancient Hebrew. The real history of our dispersion from Babylon is set in Aramaic and *targum*. Everything else is derived — read *interpreted*. Sadly, the ancient tongues have been lost to all but the academics among us, and their songs sing no more. The same is now threatened for Yiddish.

Sad, you may say, that Yiddish is waning. However, therein lies a very real danger, because the active and purposeful translation of ghetto *lider* into present-day Israeli Hebrew (a great distance from the "Holy Tongue") is not only "derived", thus distancing us from our own recent, formative history, but it is not an authentic spiritual representation of the circumstances of the holocaust.

To whatever extent one ascribes the positive or negative virtues of those events, whether heroism or tragedy, cultural renaissance or decline, reaffirmation of ethnic identity or theological disaffection, the entire solepcism was a product of Western Europe (and in its Jewish mode of expression — Yiddish). It cannot justifiably be removed from those brackets without changing its signs, or its meanings.

Anything, but the authentic Yiddish voice of the ashes is a betrayal of the *tsayt-gayst*. That other tongues may wish to emulate the spirit in translation, may do them honour, but in no way can they claim it for their own, nor must they be allowed to try. The very act of selection is already a historical distortion. So, what is there to change? What to hide?

YESTERDAY'S WORLD

The blanket of ashes lies four layers thick. Closest to the earth, as might be expected and, incidentally, a still observable phenomenon, there are the songs of nostalgia — a desperate clinging to the values and experience of past normality, if not stability. These songs reflect the world that the *shtetl* and *shtot* ghosts under-

stood, and which would naturally bring comfort to their uncomprehending minds:

*Dokh der alef-beys ligt mir in zikorn
Vos kh'hob gelernt kleynerheyt in kheder.
Khotch s'zayner shoyn fariber zeyer fil
yorn,
Dokh gedenk ikh nokh dos ad ha-yom
keseyder.*

Yet, the *alef-beys* lives on in my memory Which I learned in *kheder* Though many years have since passed Yet will I remember "until the day" (I die). (part of the chorus from *Kheder Yorn* by J. Zerkiewicz — Lodz Ghetto)

Another song:

*Di zelbe gesn un tramveyen —
Numern eyns un fir.
Di zelbe kinder loyfn, shreyen . . .*

*Tsi darf es azoy zayn?
Tsi muz es azoy zayn?
Az far eyne iz glik bashert,
Un far dem tseyt iz alts farvert.
Ver hot es ayngeshtelt
Azoy zol zayn di velt?
Es fregt, un vekt dos harts mayns,
Tsi dark azoy zayn?
Darf azoy zayn?*

The same streets and buses —
Numbers one and four.
The same children run, and shout. . .

Need it be like this?
Must it be like this?
That for one fortune is ordained
And for another everything is worthless.
Who arranged it thus
That the world must be like this?
It asks and strains my heart,
Need it be like this?
Needs be thus?
(K. Broydo — Vilna Ghetto)

The passive, subjective, realities which rendered such sentiments "popular" and repeatable are precisely the folk memories, or identification (ie., *shtetl* Yid) which the State of Israel wishes to distance itself from. Therefore, these songs have not been, nor are they likely to be, translated.

SONGS OF THE VICTIMS

The second ashen layer, like Pompeian excavations, has preserved in aspic the horrors and the pathos at the threshold of human endurance, a chronicle of the lowest ebb of survival. Ignore these songs at your peril because, should they be lost, they will need to be created anew (alas, Lebanon). These are the songs of the victims. Thus:

*Shtiler, shtiler, lomir shvaygn
Kvorim vaksn do
S'hobn zey farflantst di sonim
Grinen zey tsum blo
S'firn vegn tsu ponar tsu
S'firt keyn veg tsurik
Iz der tate vu farshvundn
Un mit im dos glik
Shtiler kind mayn, veyn nit oytser
S'helft nit keyn geveyn
Undzer umglik veln sonim
Say vi nit farshteyn
S'hobn bregn oykh di yamen
S'hobn tfises oykh et tsamen
Nor tsu undzer payn
Keyn bisl shayn*

Silence, silence, let no one speak
Tombstones are growing here
They have been nurtured by our enemies
They are blooming to the daylight
Roads are leading to Ponar (rail departure to Auschwitz)
No road leads back
Father is as vanished
And with him our hope
Shush my child, don't cry treasure
Crying doesn't help
Our tragedy will, by our enemies
Never be understood anyway
Even oceans have limits
Even prison have cracks
But into our suffering
Not even a little light.

(S. Kaczerginski — Vilna Ghetto)

*Gey ikh mir mit gikhe trit
Un a fule tarbe shlep ikh mit
Un di fis fun midkeyt boygn zikh
Un dos vaser rint fun di shikh.*

*Oyf shnoriteh bin ikh haynt geven
Un keyn blankn knept nit gezen
Un gekrogn hob ikh for a sakh
Vu nemt men koyekh tsu shlepn
Az men iz tus shvakh?*

*Mir zaynen ale shnorers gevorn haynt
Vayl mir zaynen yidn un men hot undz*

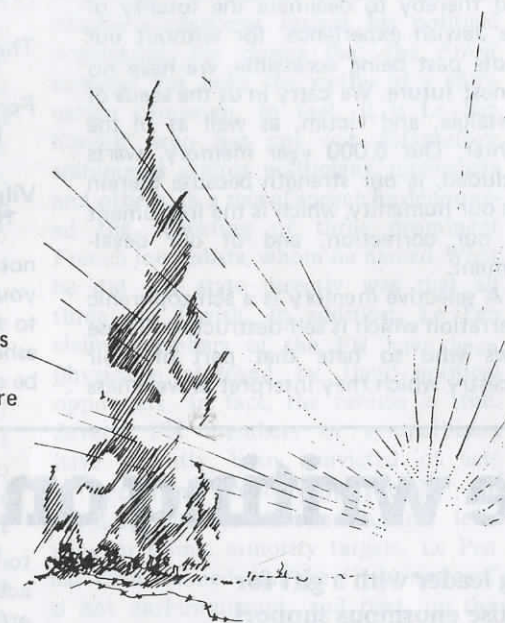
*Fun eybik on zikh tsit shoyn ot dos lid
"Akh vi shver un biter siz tsu zayn a yid!"*

I make my way with hurried steps
And drag along my full sack
And my legs are bowed from exhaustion
And the water leaks through my shoes.

Today, I have been out begging
And not a simple button have I seen
Yet I did manage to gather quite a bit
Where does one get the strength to pull it
When one is spent?

We have all become beggars now
Because we are Jews and are hated
From ever on has this song been spun
"How difficult and bitter 'tis to be a Jew".
(Oyf Shnorite, Chanah Heitin — Shovler Ghetto)

The victims lulled their children to sleep with the news that, "I saw your daddy die, buried beneath a hail of stones"



(s'loifn, s'yogn), or "God has closed down the world and night has descended. It stalk us everywhere with horror and terror. We stand here where fright is always near and I do not know where the road leads." (*Makh Tzu di Eygelekh*)

The nightmarishly distorting mirror took known and beloved songs and rewrote them. Thus *Oifn pripichok brent a fyerl, un in shtuvb iz hais* (a fire is burning in the stove and the cottage is warm) became, *By'm ghettor toyerl brent a fayerl. Di Kontrol iz groys*, (by the ghetto a fire burns and the guards are many). Again, *Hot zikh mir di shikh tsurisn* (my shoes have torn) is an ironic parody of a comic wedding song.

Ballads (*Rivkele di Shabesdikhe*), dirges (*Ghetto*) and poetry recorded the new reality, but, for whom? The ashes needed no reminders, no descriptions. No. The victims needed to hope that the world outside would take notice of them, would somehow hear their cries (*Es Brent!*). Barring that, and we shall find more of this later, the songs were directed

to ears not yet born — the future generations — us (!) and our children, so that we might know, and remember, and learn (much as we are entreated to do in the Pessach Haggadah — to observe the service as though we ourselves had been freed). Today, outside of Yad Vahem (the great memorial in Israel) this memory is dimming, waning with Yiddish as its familiars dies off. Empathy with victims, in all but general terms is not the image which the State wishes to perpetuate (what price South Africa?).

FIGHTING BACK

However, the third and the fourth layers are the stuff of translators, for here begins heroism and resistance. *Shtil di nakht iz oysgeshternt* tells of a partisan girl who blows up an advancing Nazi column. *Itzik Vitnberg* eulogizes the partisan commandant who surrendered himself as a ransom to forestall the bombardment of the Vilna Ghetto:

*S'ligt ergets fartayet
Der faynt vi a khaye
Der mauzer er vakht in mayn hant
Nor plutsem geshtapo
Es firt a geshmitn
Durkh finsternish dem komendant*

Somewhere, lying in wait
(for) The hated one, he like a beast
The machine-gun alert in my hand
Then suddenly, Gestapo!
There follows a clash . . .
Through the smoke, there is the

commandant.
(S. Kaczerginski — Vilna Ghetto)

Corresponding to the allied armies' advances, there began to become apparent the effectiveness of the resistance movements. The gritty determination of survival which, in its musical forms, bolstered morale and spread news of conditions and successes, was overtaken by the songs urging everyone to positive action and armed resistance.

*Nor brider an anderer vitem
Vet bald tsu dayn oyer dergeyn
Un di vos far shrek
Geven ersht farshtekt
Shpanen mit undz
Nit aleyn
Tsu eyns-tvey-dray
Di geslekh, dem toyer farlozt
S'hot der trot aza klang
Gor an ander gezang
Ven du geyst, un du veyst shoyn farvos.*

But brothers, a different rhythm
Will soon reach your ears
And they who, for fear
Were first to hide
Will walk forth with us

No longer alone
To: one-two-three
The streets and (prison) gates left behind
The stamp of our marching feet
Have quite another sound
When you move, but this time you know,
why.

(L. Rozental — Vilna Ghetto)

Everyone was needed! Age or infirmity
were no excuse. In the vanguard, the
intoxication of the new optimism was
proclaimed by the youth:

Vayl, yung iz yeder ver es vil nor
Yorn hobn keyn badayt
Alte kenen oykh zayn kinder
In a nayer frayer tsayt.

Because youth is for anyone who wills it
Age is of no significance
The old can also be as children
In a new, free era.

(Yugnt Hymn, S. Kacerginski — Vilna
Ghetto)

And perhaps the most famous hymn of
all, of the *Partizans*, will bring comfort to
every resistance fighter for years to
come...

Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn
veg

Ven himlen blayene farsheln bloye teg
Kumen vet nokh undzer oysgebenkte sho
Es bet a poyk ton undzer trot mir
zaynen do.

Don't ever say you are walking the
last road
When leaden skies obscure the blue day
Because our longed-for hour will come
Our steps shall resound, we are here!

(H. Glik — Vilna Ghetto)

These are the still visible ashes, the top
layers. The storms which the fascist
survivors have tried to stir have not yet
succeeded in blowing them away.

TRUE VOICES

Nor must we permit the true voices,
the Yiddish voices to become estranged,
and thereby to decimate the totality of
the Jewish experience, for without our
whole past being accessible, we have no
honest future. We carry in us the seeds of
nostalgia, and victim, as well as of the
fighter. Our 5,000 year memory, warts
included, is our strength because therein
lies our humanity, which is the instrument
of our correction, and of our devel-
opment.

A selective memory is a schizophrenic
aberration which is self-destructive. Those
Jews who so hate that part of their
ancestry which they interpret as weakness

(eg non-resisting compliance with the gas
ovens) must come to recognise that their
own, personal insecurities are endangering
the stability of the whole. The "self-
hating" Jew is not the critic. It is the
schizoid defender of part-of-the-Faith-
only who seeks to exorcise the sub-
jectively unacceptable part. That is moral
cowardice. They betray the ghosts who
prayed on the road to death, "Do not
forget me!"

Az du vest amol a mamele zayn
Zolstu dayne kinder dertseyln dem payn
Vos tate un mame gehat hot fun faynt
Farges nit dem nekhtn — dermon es
zikh haynt.

One day, when you will be a mother
Then you tell your children of the
suffering
That your mum and dad had (because)
of hate

Forget not this yesterday —
Remind yourself that today.

(Dos Elente Kind, S. Kacerginski —
Vilna Ghetto)

The song of the ashes says, "We ought
not to be ash. We should yet be alive as
you who hear, live. But, if it is not meant
to be, then at least, let the song of my
ashes not be forgotten. For then, you too
be ash." □

Le Pen—the writing on the wall

A charismatic, right-wing leader with a gift for
using the media, can mobilise enormous support,
warns Tony Blend.

White-faced, with shining teeth and short,
fair hair, Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of
France's extreme right-wing *Front
national* party (FN), smiles out at you
from the advertising billboard in the
street, as if he were advertising a new
brand of toothpaste. In fact, the pro-
duct being advertised is the National
Front, French-style.

There are, at present, significant
differences between Britain's National
Front and France's *Front national*.
One difference is in their respective
electoral fortunes. There are no official
National Front MPs at Westminster. In
contrast, there are now 33 *Front national*
Deputies in the French National Assembly,
to add to their 10 FN Euro-MPs at the
European Parliament. The FN won the
support of 9.65% of the electorate, at
the French Legislative Elections last
March, to add to its 10.95% showing at
the last European elections.

Another difference lies in strength
of party leadership. The leader of the

British National Front could hardly be
described as articulate, charismatic and
intelligent. Yet these are all characteristics
of his French counterpart. It is true that
part of the FN's success can be attribut-
ed to the newly-introduced electoral
system of proportional representation,
which favours minority parties, but the
personality of its leader, Jean-Marie Le
Pen, is still a major factor. Whether you
like his politics or not, his presentation
of them is slick. This is his trump card,
and he plays it well.

Jean-Marie Le Pen is a politician with
many strings to his bow, and one or two
skeletons in his closet. A former law
graduate and sub-lieutenant in the French
army, 58 year-old Le Pen is a Deputy, a
Euro-MP and the Director of a public
relations company as well as being the
official FN candidate for the forth-
coming Presidential elections. He is in
his 15th year as party leader. However,
his military past is the subject of much
speculation and controversy. He is alleged

to have authorised and been involved in
acts of torture carried out by the French
army during Algeria's war of
independence.

Le Pen's analysis of the problems
facing French society is simple and
straightforward and centres on the issue
of immigration. He claims that immig-
rants are responsible for unemployment;
that immigrants are responsible for crime
and the breakdown of law and order;
that immigrants have such large families
that, ultimately, French nationals will be
overrun; and finally, that immigrants
are costing the French tax-payer a fortune
in social-security benefits.

His solutions are, in the long-term,
compulsory repatriation for all immigrants;
in the short-term, state benefits to be
paid only to French nationals. In general,
French nationals to receive preferential
treatment as far as jobs are concerned.
With regard to law and order in general,
and terrorism in particular, Le Pen
advocates the return of the guillotine.

Media messages

There is a temptation in all of us to
become morbidly fascinated by evil.
In France, the media and the electorate,
became fascinated in this way by Jean-



Marie Le Pen. He received regular coverage
on prime-time TV slots, the whole of
France curious to see this media phenom-
enon in action. In the run-up to the
March 1986 legislative elections, a highly-
publicised FN election campaign produced
several stormy and controversial media
appearances. Le Pen regularly made
mincemeat of France's best journalists.
The voice speaks self-assuredly, the
repartee flows thick and fast. On radio
and TV, Le Pen ran rings around his
interviewers, making idiots out of many
political opponents who dared challenge
his policies.

Because of his charisma, the parties
of the more traditional Republican/
Gaullist French Right became reluctant
to condemn *Front national* policies too
openly and too often. It became clear
that it was electorally unwise to appear
too critical, not of the leader himself,
but of policies which were rapidly gaining
respectability among the voting public.
And the election results confirmed that
the message was transmitted successfully.

How was this achieved? It is hard to
explain from simply reading transcripts
of Le Pen's pre-election radio or TV
interviews. The words alone do not give
the flavour of Le Pen in action. Indeed,
Le Pen in print, and Le Pen in person,
come over very differently. If you *listen*
to or *watch* a Le Pen interview it is very
easy to become fascinated by the combin-
ation of political ring-wing extremism
and articulate expression. However, *read*
the same interview, and you will not be
impressed at all. On TV and radio, he
dresses up extreme right-wing policies in
the most respectable linguistic packaging.
The same policies on the printed page
come over for what they are: reactionary,
retrograde and irrelevant. The Le Pen
phenomenon has very little to do with
words, or argument and a great deal to
do with presentation. He relies on a tried
and tested formula based on a combinat-
ion of reverse logic, personal attack and
factual inaccuracy which we shall now
examine more closely.

Media tactics

The first Le Pen hallmark is the practice
of turning accusations against him into
counter-accusations against his political
opponents. He claims that the *Front
national* has been the victim of a vilifi-
cation campaign. In fact, it is Le Pen
himself who has put out defamatory
statements against politicians, journalists
and others. In a recent speech he denounc-
ed the reporting of three prominent
French journalists, whom he named. What
he did not state directly was that all
three are Jewish. In addition, Le Pen
claims members of the FN have been
physically attacked by their political
opponents. In fact, the reverse is true.
Several FN members or sympathisers
have recently been convicted of acts
of terrorism, vandalism, robbery or
physical violence directed against left-
wing or ethnic minority targets. Le Pen
has even claimed that the *Front national*
is not anti-immigrant, and that, on the
contrary, it has the *support* of many
immigrants. Once again, the reverse is
true. One of the FN's popular slogans
is: *Les Français d'abord* (French nationals
first). So, the first Le Pen tactic is:
attack is the best form of defence.

A second successful tactic is the
insult. This diverts attention away from
concrete facts where Le Pen knows he
is weak and is also entertaining.

A third tactic is to use exaggeration,
half-truths and lies. His public state-
ments are liberally punctuated with
factual distortions of varying degrees of
inaccuracy. Yet it is here that Le Pen
is potentially at his weakest and easiest
to discredit. Take, for instance, the FN's
general slogan: French Nationals First.
This is partly based on the argument
that immigration is costing the French
tax-payer a fortune. Le Pen quotes figures
that purportedly prove that the tax-payer
(presumably the French-national tax-
payer, as opposed to the immigrant tax-
payer!) contributes more and takes out
less, than immigrants do. However, the
source of his figures remains a mystery.

As a matter of fact, no official statistics
are kept relating to the respective social-
security contributions and payments of
French nationals as opposed to immig-
rants. Le Pen counters this by saying
that, if no such break-down exists, then
one should be carried out. Here his case
falls apart as he is quoting figures which,
a moment later, he admits do not exist.

When he is charged with a contradict-
ion in his logic, he becomes angry, and
threatens to walk out of the interview.
This anger is both a tactic, and an admis-
sion of weakness. For as long as the
discussion centres on general policy, or
on insults, accusations and counter-
accusations, rather than on the sources
of his statistics, he is content. But bring
the discussion on to a rational footing,
challenge his figures, and he's off. He
knows that if you discredit the figures
you discredit the policy.

Here, we arrive at a key conclusion.
The *Front national*'s electoral chances
depend largely on its leader's media
technique. Only if this is understood
can he be effectively challenged.

Unfortunately, this has not been
widely understood. The French media,
and in particular, well-intentioned anti-
Le Pen journalists, have inadvertently
increased his party's popularity. Press
smear campaigns and appeals to the
public morality simply backfired. By
making the FN leader the object of
accusations, they effectively made him
seem worthy of public sympathy, the
individual victim of press harassment.
The *only* effective way of discrediting
his policies is to highlight the inaccuracies
and distortions upon which they are
based.

Lessons to be learned

The political parties in France are now
looking ahead to the Presidential elections
in 1988. Not that Le Pen has the slight-
est chance of winning. But with the way
things stand at present in the French
National Assembly, the *Front national*
is a force to be reckoned with. On a few
significant occasions, they have found
themselves in the position that all minority
parties dream of; holding the balance of
power. They have taken full advantage
of this by transforming all such votes
into votes on the issue of immigration.

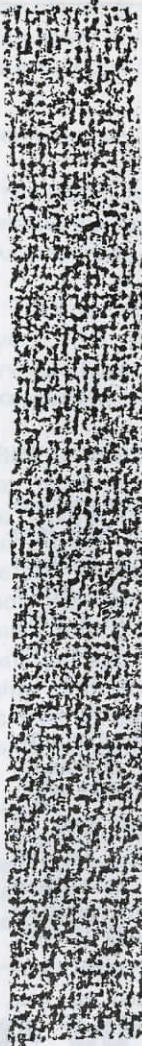
Recently, they were instrumental in
electing an Opposition Socialist candidate
to the Presidency of the all-party Commis-
sion for Foreign Affairs, in preference to
the right-wing Government's own candi-
date, Bernard Stasi. This was an astonishing
result, since the right has a majority in
the National Assembly. However, Bernard

Stasi is well-known as a vociferous campaigner for the rights of immigrants.¹ So, the *Front national* chose to support the socialist candidate.

With the imminent prospect of a General Election in Britain, there are some lessons to be drawn from the French experience. Firstly, we must assess how much of any politicians' performance is, indeed, performance and how much solid policy. Secondly, we must scrutinise the sources of statistics quoted by politicians, to justify policy-statements made. Thirdly, we must recognise that xenophobic, nationalistic policies, when attractively dressed-up, are capable of exerting a morbid fascination on us all, and that high media ratings can lead to disproportionate success at the ballot box. Fourthly, and consequently, we must demand that the media keep politics and entertainment as separate as possible. Finally, we must realise that the Le Pen phenomenon could be happening in Britain, given the right economic conditions and the emergence of a similarly charismatic leader.

Meanwhile, the toothpaste smile of Jean-Marie Le Pen continues to shine out from posters on street walls across France and, for the time being at least, the product being advertised continues to sell. □

1. Author of *L'Immigration; une chance pour la France*.



The Face of Jewish Socialism

Directed by Ronnie Landau
Spiro Institute Productions 1986
VHS video, colour, 32 mins

An educational documentary on the birth of Jewish Socialism in Russia and its development in America, Britain and Palestine, 1881-1914.

Purchase price: £25.00 plus £1.00 p & p per copy
Hire price: £ 5.00

Further details from:

The Spiro Institute for the Study of Jewish History and Culture
c/o Westfield College
(University of London)
Kidderpore Avenue
London NW3 7ST
Tel: (01) 431-0345

GOSPEL TRUTH AS HISTORICAL FALSEHOOD

Steve Cohen looks at the political effects of Christianity and raises thorny issues for socialists about religion.

The Mythmaker – Paul and the Invention of Christianity by Hyam Maccoby (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £10.95).

Historical re-interpretation can reveal many paradoxes. For instance Arthur Koestler in his celebrated *The Thirteenth Tribe* showed that the mass of European Jewry, far from being direct linear descendants of Abraham (a fantastic enough proposition anyway), were in fact 10th Century Khazar converts to Judaism. Actually the closest Abraham has to traceable descendants are maybe the Palestinians – who probably remained in Palestine after the diaspora and were converts from Judaism to Islam in the 8th century. And now Hyam Maccoby in *The Mythmaker* convincingly argues that

Christianity as practised for two millennia has little to do with the teachings of Christ but has everything to do with the falsifications of Paul. All this certainly does give an ironical twist to history. On the one hand the European victims of antisemitism have not been "biblical" Jews but historic Khazars emanating from the central plains of Russia. On the other hand Christianity, the fount and origin of antisemitism by ascribing all evil to the Jews, is in complete contradiction to the teachings and practice of Jesus and his immediate followers.

Maccoby's task is to demythologise

the lives of Jesus and Paul and to situate them in the material world. He commenced this work in his earlier book, *Revelation in Judea – Jesus and the Jewish Resistance*. In that he showed how Jesus claimed no divinity for himself. Rather Jesus saw himself, and was seen by his disciples and enemies, as leading the resistance to the Roman occupation of Judea. This was why the Romans crucified him – their usual method of execution for political oppositionists. The Gospels and the rest of the New Testament are an elaborate and highly successful attempt to rewrite history by depoliti-

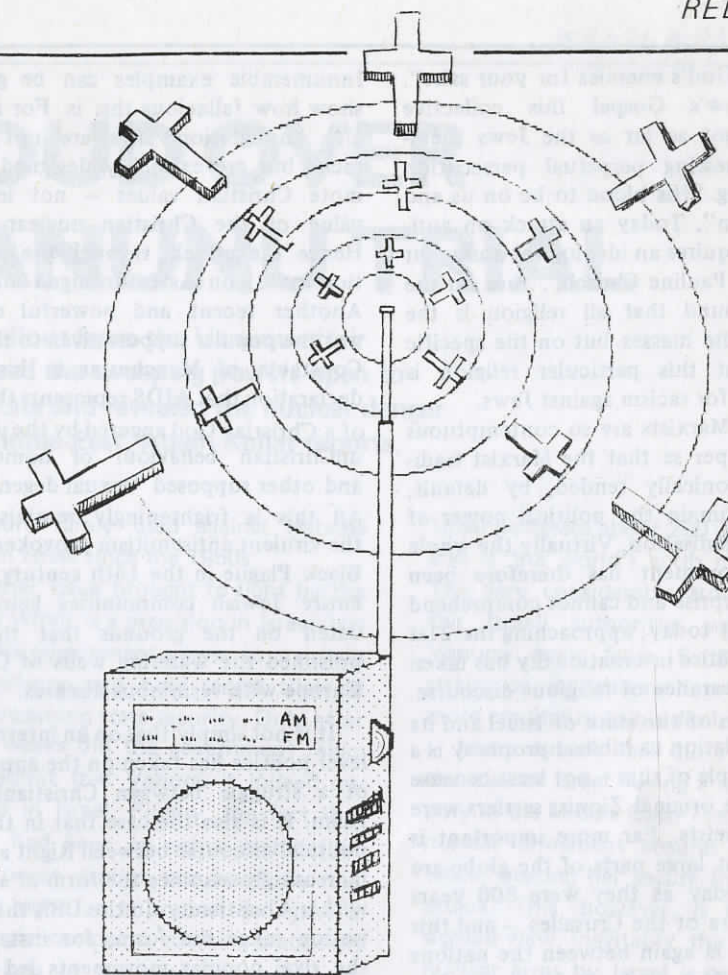
cising Jesus, holding the Jews responsible for his execution and giving him the status of a godhead. In his latest book Maccoby explains how the source of all this fantasy was Paul. It was Paul who constructed the myth of Jesus as the self-proclaimed founder of a new religion based on his own divine status. Significantly it was Paul who invented the cannibalistic ritual of the Eucharist – the mystical incorporation of the initiate into the godhead by drinking the blood and eating the body of Christ. In this way Paul was reverting to the pre-Judaic mystery religions of the Hellenistic world and thereby established Christianity as an essentially pagan ideology. Maccoby shows quite clearly that after the crucifixion Christ's immediate followers, in particular James and Peter, regarded themselves as simply another Jewish sect, whose essential defining feature was the belief in the future return of Jesus not as God but as a liberator, a Messiah, against the Romans. James and Peter founded the Nazarenes – Jewish followers of Jesus who accepted all the fundamental tenets of the Judaic faith. To establish Christianity Paul split politically from the Nazarenes and built a Church that was, in a literal sense, Anti-Christ.

An immediate reaction to Maccoby's historical re-evaluation might well be to ask "So what? C'est magnifique – but who cares?" Such an attitude has certain spurious plausibility. After all people's perception of reality, including historical fact, is for them as important as reality itself. However, what is at stake here is false consciousness – and this affects reality. In fact it helps recreate it in its own, craven, imagery. Moreover those who cling to outmoded and false historical interpretation normally do so for the most reactionary of reasons. For instance Koestler's book was threatened with being banned in Israel – as it distinctly threatened that wing of Zionism which asserts that Jews internationally have a franchise on Israel by direct linear descent. Likewise Maccoby's book will be undoubtedly attacked by powerful sections of the Church as Maccoby shows that the Church is Pauline and un-Christian.

Hyam Maccoby is an academic. The present book, though, is written for a popular readership. As such it involves a re-examination of the Gospels as historical falsification. For most Jews this in itself poses a potential difficulty in understanding his book. This difficulty exists in the fact that in our upbringing the Gospels have been treated as virtually forbidden reading. Given the antagonism evinced by the Christian Church towards Jewry it is quite reasonable that the founding document of that Church, its program-

matic basis, should have been avoided by Jews. Speaking personally I absented myself from "religious education" (ie., Christian education) at state schools from the age of five. To have attended would have felt like a forced baptism. My only knowledge of the New Testament has been imbibed almost unconsciously through having lived a life where the radio has been continually turned on in the background – which has meant 40 years of *The Daily Service* at 10.45am on Radio 4. On reading Maccoby's book I was somewhat shocked to realise that I do already have from this source a pretty extensive knowledge of Christian theology. This truly is a Christian country – and most of its missionary work is, now undertaken subliminally across the airways. Within this context the occasional dose of Rabbi Lionel Blue is simply a token gesture. However, it does make Maccoby's book easier to understand.

Maccoby's thesis poses a total challenge. It exposes the fraudulent basis of the world's dominant religion – Christianity. Whatever view is taken of religion per se this is of great political significance in that it is Christianity and no other faith which is the religion of imperialism. It is the white Christian nations which have emerged as triumphant and exploitative. Socialists rarely treat questions of religion with any degree of seriousness. All analysis usually



stops at the repetition of Marx's famous aphorism that "Religion is the opium of the masses". On a trivial level it could be said that in many parts of the Western world today cocaine is the opium of the masses. However if Maccoby's book does nothing else it should galvanise socialists into a proper consideration of the contemporary and historical role of religion.

It would be rather too extravagant to expect the Church to reform itself from within to the point of really becoming Christian, as this would require an acknowledgement that Christ was not a divine entity but was instead a Jewish rabbi politically opposed to Roman military occupation of his country. Paradoxically, for the Church to become genuinely Christian it would have to embrace Judaism, as Christ was an unrepentant Jew. However, at the very least the Church should accept responsibility for its own historic antisemitism and see that it was Paul who created the antisemitic myth of the Jewish conspiracy in the same way as he created the myth of Jesus's godliness. In fact myths are complementary. It was Paul who assigned to all Jews collectively the role of the "sacred executioner" – the killer of the godhead. Jesus's own Reincarnation only served to prove that the Jews were and are the Devil Incarnate for rejecting him. As Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans – the Jews "are

"treated as God's enemies for your sake". In Matthew's Gospel this collective guilt has got as far as the Jews themselves requesting perpetual persecution by declaring "His blood to be on us and our children". Today an attack on anti-semitism requires an ideological onslaught against the Pauline Church... not on the general ground that all religion is the opium of the masses but on the specific ground that this particular religion is responsible for racism against Jews.

In fact, Marxists are so contemptuous of religion per se that the Marxist tradition has ironically tended, by default, to underestimate the political power of religious organisation. Virtually the whole socialist movement has therefore been taken by surprise and cannot comprehend the fact that today, approaching the 21st century, politics internationally has taken on the appearance of religious discourse.

The creation of the state of Israel and its nebulous relation to biblical prophecy is a trivial example of this — not least because many of the original Zionist settlers were militant atheists. Far more important is the fact that large parts of the globe are polarised today as they were 800 years ago in the era of the Crusades — and this polarisation is again between the nations of Christendom and of Islam. In the material world this of course represents a struggle between exploiter and exploited countries, between imperialism and the Third World. What is startling is the way this struggle is explicitly justified in terms of competing religions. Thus the ritual and racist denunciation in the West of the rise of "Islamic fundamentalism" is hypocritical and bizarre given the re-emergence of Christian fundamentalism. The USA, the heart of Western imperialism, is under the political and ideological domination of the self-styled Christian Moral Majority. Incomparably more significant than anything said or done by, for instance, Gaddafi (who is regularly portrayed in the West as a devil figure) is the fact that the present President of the USA has publicly declared his belief in the coming of Armageddon. At the same time Reagan has denounced the Soviet Union, with its ideology of communism, atheism and supposed support for Third World liberation movements, as being the "Evil Empire" — and Reagan sees it as his role to eliminate evil. Naturally the reason all this is significant is that the President of the USA, unlike Gaddafi, actually has the ability to personally create Armageddon simply by pressing the nuclear button.

Likewise in the UK most socialists tend to underestimate and deny the power of Christian ideology and organisation. There is a hidden assumption on the Left that Britain is somehow secular.

Innumerable examples can be given to show how fallacious this is. For instance UK immigration laws are not simply racist but are explicitly designed to promote Christian values — not least the value of the Christian nuclear family. Hence the attack, through the immigration rules, on Asian arranged marriages. Another recent and powerful example was the popular support given to the Chief Constable of Manchester in his public declaration that AIDS represents the wrath of a Christian God angered by the ungodly, unChristian behaviour of homosexuals and other supposed "sexual degenerates". All this is frighteningly reminiscent of the virulent antisemitism provoked by the Black Plague in the 14th century — with entire Jewish communities being liquidated on the grounds that they had poisoned the watering wells of Christian Europe with verminous diseases.

It is not simply that on an international level politics has taken on the appearance of a struggle between Christianity and Islam. It is also the case that in the West political discourse between Right and Left increasingly assumes the form of a debate within Christianity. In the USA this polarisation takes the form, for instance, of the rival popular movements led by the Reverend Jerry Falwell on the Right and the Reverend Jesse Jackson on the Left. In the UK, whereas Prime Minister Thatcher invokes the authority of God for developing nuclear weaponry, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament throws up as its main figure a Catholic priest — Bruce Kent. Not only does all this reveal the primacy of Christian ideology; it also points to how problematic is the Christianisation of Left politics. For instance Jesse Jackson is tainted with antisemitism, referring to Jews as "Hymies" and accepting the support of the arch antisemite Louis Farrakhan until that became politically inexpedient. Again CND in this country is besotted with the thought of the world's destruction (ie Armageddon) to the point of ignoring imperialist aggression that is actually happening in the world today — witness the silence of the CND in the face of the USA's invasion of Grenada and Reagan's support for those attempting to overthrow the regime in Nicaragua. This ignoring of present oppression in favour of some future salvation is a classic example of Pauline Christianity at work.

A serious historical question to which socialists should address themselves anyway is why in political terms has Christianity become the world's dominant religion? Why did imperialism arise in the White West and not in the Muslim East? Why did Islam during the Crusades fail to capture Europe? Of course the answer to

this is essentially economic and political and has nothing to do with religious belief as such. It has to do with the political power of the feudal economy. However, central to this power was the position of the organised Catholic Church. The Church along with the Baronial class was the chief landowner and therefore dominant economic force within Feudal Europe, with the ability to mobilise huge armies. There was no equivalent within the Muslim world. Moreover, though the economic power of the Church was to decline under capitalism and imperialism, when it split into various sects, its ideological strength remained unimpaired. Witness the missionary and "civilising" role consciously undertaken by different wings of the Christian churches in the conquest of Africa.

Finally the whole notion of religion per se as being the opiate of the masses is problematic and should be reconsidered. Religious belief is not necessarily incompatible with a materialistic and progressive understanding of the world. Of course most *organised* religion has been essentially corrupt and reactionary — the history of the Pauline Church being a prime example of this. However, not even all organised religion has been regressive. For instance today in Latin America important factions of the Church — those subscribing to "liberation theology" — are actively involved in freedom struggles. This will itself inevitably lead to another split within Catholicism, with the Third World churches breaking from Rome. Quite apart from the question of organised religion there is the need to acknowledge that *personal* religious belief in its widest sense of belief in positive spiritual values is not inconsistent with a revolutionary socialist position. Indeed it is essential to it. Socialism, the abolition of class society, is not simply an arithmetic construct. Rather it is premised on certain values — not least justice and equality. Spiritual values are not necessarily alienated values. Like everything else they can exhibit contradictory features. In particular, long established communal faiths such as, for example, Judaism have developed a corpus of understanding and of ritual, some of which is reactionary and other parts of which are progressive. Where personal belief does become an opium is where it relapses into defeatism where it becomes premised on the notion that utopia cannot be struggled for in the real material world but can only come through divine salvation in a supposed life hereafter. However, the only religion that preaches this defeatism as absolute gospel truth is that of the Pauline Church.

As they say at the end of the Daily Service on Radio 4, "Here endeth the lesson". □

CLOUD OVER THE VANUNU TRIAL

The fallout from the Vanunu affair has escaped the sweeping powers open to the Israeli state and revealed the nuclear danger in the Middle-East. Adam Keller reports.

Most newspaper readers all over the world are, by now, familiar with the name of Mordechai Vanunu, the former employee of Israel's nuclear pile at Dimona, who gave the London *Sunday Times* a sensational account of that closely guarded pile. The Vanunu Affair has many points of interest. Parts of Vanunu's strange career seem to be taken out of the pages of a spy thriller; the Israeli and world media concentrated much of their attention on a relentless search for the smallest details of Vanunu's personal life. This partly resulted from the Israeli government's heavy-handed use of military censorship to silence any serious discussion on the issue of nuclear armament. Censorship went as far as entirely cutting out the editorials of several newspapers —

a measure rarely used against Hebrew papers in Israel since the 1950s.

Another issue brought to light by the Vanunu Affair is a provision in Israeli law giving the government power to maintain secret prisons and hold secret trials in cases concerning state security. Only after several weeks did the government reluctantly admit that Vanunu is indeed imprisoned in Israel. Finally, the fact that Vanunu had been an active member of several peace groups was used by the extreme right as a pretext to open a McCarthyist campaign, accusing practically all members of the peace movement of being "traitors" and "potential spies".

The most important aspect of the affair remains, however, Vanunu's disclosures themselves. If these are to be believed,

Israel possesses about 200 nuclear bombs, and is the world's sixth nuclear power. The very considerable trouble to which the Israeli authorities went to bring Vanunu back from Britain, risking a strain on British-Israeli relations, lends more credibility to his disclosures.

Many Israelis feel quite pleased with the idea of Israel having a nuclear monopoly in the Middle East. They believe that nuclear armament ensures Israel's existence, making her secure from any Arab attack. This, however, is a very short-sighted view. Inevitably, the possession of nuclear arms by Israel is perceived as an intolerable threat by the Arab countries, who seek to obtain similar arms themselves. Such acts as Israel's bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 can slow down this process, but not stop it.

Sooner or later, other Middle Eastern countries will also possess nuclear arms. In the best (or least evil) case, a Middle Eastern "Balance of Terror" will then be established, with neither side daring to use its nuclear arsenal. Even that is not a very cheerful prospect to those who seek genuine peace; but there is no guarantee that such a balance will indeed be established.

Both in Israel and in the Arab and Muslim countries, religious and nationalist fanatics are numerous and powerful. On either side, nuclear weapons might eventually fall into the hands of leaders ruthless enough to use them and risk the consequences. Thus, nuclear armament — far from being an absolute guarantee for Israel's security — may spell Israel's doom and turn the entire Middle East into a radioactive desert.

To stop this horror, the Israeli Peace movement must, like its European and American counterparts, adopt the call for nuclear disarmament and the creation of a nuclear-free Middle East.

Reprinted with kind permission of *The Other Israel*, POB 956, Tel-Aviv, Israel 61008.

ARAFAT'S PLO RECOGNIZES ISRAEL

The PLO has in fact stated it recognizes all UN resolutions pertaining to Israel and Palestine

MANY ISRAELIS SUPPORT A PALESTINIAN STATE ALONGSIDE ISRAEL

Israeli citizens are risking prison terms to meet with PLO members because they believe that the only way to build peace is by "talking to the enemy"



SO WHAT'S PREVENTING PEACE?



For 16 years Israel & Palestine Political Report has provided readers with in-depth analysis to understand who's making the peace and who's causing the war. And why the Middle East is the most likely place where World War III could start.

SUBSCRIBE TO I&P TODAY!

Send your check to:
MAGELAN, 5 rue Cardinal Mercier, 75009 Paris France
(\$ 50 institutions / \$ 30 individuals)

FREE TRIAL ISSUE
ON REQUEST

Israel breaks with South Africa?

**Elfi Pallis wonders
just how genuine are recent
decisions to reduce contacts**

On 15 January 1987, three months before the expiry of the deadline set by Congress to countries still supplying arms to South Africa and wishing to benefit from future aid, Israeli Defence Minister Itzhak Rabin formally announced that all direct military links between Israel and South Africa had been severed. However, reports which have appeared

in the Israeli press since cast severe doubt on this statement. On 18 January an unnamed senior government official told Israeli journalists that Israel in fact would persevere in all aspects of its relations with South Africa, and had no intention of severing its air, trade or diplomatic links with that country. He added that Israel would also continue to exchange technological, research and development data with South Africa. The situation, according to him, was entirely unchanged, and he insisted that Israel's forthcoming assurance to Congress that it was not arming South Africa was meaningless.

On the actual scale of Israeli arms sales to South Africa so far, Israeli papers have only quoted Western "speculations", but have stressed that Iran and South Africa have long been the key export markets for Israel's military and semi-military output. The loss of these markets, and the compensation Israel would have to pay to South Africa for not honouring long standing contracts (some of them concluded by Labour administrations), would be bitter financial blow, and commentators feel that a genuine break with South Africa is therefore unlikely.

Instead, the Israeli Foreign Ministry has officially decided to restrict and perhaps end the sending of official Israeli delegations in the field of sport, culture and youth exchange to South Africa. That other types of exchanges would continue, as implied by the unnamed senior official, became clear on 1 February, when Israeli Science Minister Gideon Patt sent an official medical delegation to South Africa, claiming that the government had not ruled on this.

The Likud-Labour coalition is clearly united on the matter. When the political director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Labour appointee Yossi Beilin, demanded this January that Israel follow the EEC line on sanctions and end official exchanges, Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin publicly rebuked him for causing grave damage to Israel's national interest, and ordered him to drop the issue immediately.

Rabin, who has visited South Africa, has been backed by most other Ministers and especially by former Defence Ministers Ariel Sharon and Ezer Weizman. Even Foreign Minister Shimon Peres has failed to support Beilin. His only government ally so far has been Communicat-

ions Minister Amnon Rubinstein, who called for Israeli sanctions against South Africa in an open letter to the Prime Minister. Even Rubinstein, however, emphasizes the pragmatic rather than the moral reasons for such a decision by saying: "Israel is exposing itself to grave accusations just as it is trying to lobby enlightened Western public opinion on behalf of Soviet and Syrian Jewry by arguing that a lack of human rights cannot be any country's internal affair. We shall be unable to say this if we keep supporting the apartheid regime. Even many of Israel's true friends in the international community abhor our relations with South Africa".

Many Israeli commentators seem convinced that Israel does not wish to alienate South Africa not just for economic and military reasons, but also because it is trying to persuade Pretoria to allow Jews emigrating to Israel to take all their money with them. This is currently impossible under South Africa's stringent capital export restrictions, but if immigrants to Israel were to be exempted from them this would greatly increase its attraction. Since 1948, only about 20,000 Jews have immigrated to Israel from South Africa, most of them after either Sharpeville or Soweto. There is almost identical number of Israeli emigrés living in South Africa. Recent emigrés have so far preferred Canada and Australia, which have become home to some 10,000 South African Jewish emigres each.

There is also still little genuine dislike of South Africa among the Israeli public, as can be seen from the small size of the "Israelis against Apartheid" movement. Most of those opposing the links with South Africa on moral grounds come from the small Mapam party and the even smaller groups to the left of it. As Professor Shlomo Avineri reminded Ma'ariv readers in an article published on 13 February, "the warnings against our continuing close relations between us and the racist South African regime have only come from a minute part of the public, and the establishment's answer to it has been one of contempt. Since most of the critics are intellectuals, politicians ask what these thinkers understand about "Realpolitik", and since when moral considerations determine policy decisions... However, what seems realism to some may in fact be more shortsightedness."

Coming home to roots

**Jewish identity is not always given.
Some people have to struggle to find it, as
Lindsay Levy discovered.**

When I was five years old I asked my mother what a Jew was. Some girl at school had told me that my father was so dark he looked like a Jew. My mother reacted quickly and angrily. She said my father wasn't a Jew and the next time anyone said that to me I should just tell her that *her* father was so yellow he looked like a Chinaman. My father, who was in earshot, tut-tutted at her and muttered his favourite Shakespearian quotation about taking as bird bolts what others deem as cannon balls. Neither of them told me what a Jew was.

In retrospect I can find a few explanations for my mother's extraordinary response. It was 1953, and the holocaust was very fresh in everyone's minds. My brother, equally uninformed about his Jewish background, had been pinned against the railings by a bunch of prefects on his first day at senior school, and told that they were going to crucify him like he had crucified Jesus. My parents, whose mixed marriage had caused ructions on both sides of the fence, just wanted to keep their heads down and blend in with the surroundings.

By the time I was thirteen I was sufficiently aware of what a Jew was to know that my best friend was one. I went with her to the community hall to see Helen Shapiro, who was giving autographs in aid of charity, and whilst I was there I asked if I could see the synagogue. It was light and bright, totally unlike the grey gloomy church my school was affiliated to. I felt as if I had come home.

From that afternoon I turned everything upside down in my efforts to find my Jewish roots. I read everything I could lay my hands on about Judaism. I stayed home on Friday nights and lit candles, fasted on *Yom Kippur* and scandalised my headmistress by refusing to attend prayers and putting myself through an O level GCE in Religious

Knowledge for Jewish candidates by sitting in the back of the class studying biblical history whilst the other girls were being taught the gospels.

Throughout all this my parents were quite supportive, which is to say they were perfectly neutral. It was all left up to me. Politics, and not religion, was the main bone of contention in our home. They had no objections to me becoming a Jew, but they had strong views on the kind of Jew I should become. Television personalities and public figures were pointed out to me. Jews who had made good. At the bottom of the heap were the "foreigners" — Jews who spoke with a foreign accent. My mother told me they had come over on the onion boat. My own great grandparents had come presumably on some kind of boat, from Corfu, but Corfu, I was told, was once a British possession, so they were British too. We were all very British, like Winston Churchill, whose bronze embossed face graced my parents' bedroom. By some kind of strange reverse osmosis I think I also believed that Winston Churchill was Jewish.

By the time I was sixteen I had made it. After a long correspondence course and an intensive study programme in London I had a *Kabbalat Mitzvah* at St John's Wood Liberal Synagogue. Now I wasn't just a bona fide Jew, I was also the only girl I knew with a framed certificate on her wall to prove it!

From the time of my sudden "conversion" up till then I'd conducted all my social life amongst Jews at Maccabi, but the following year I left home and headed first North to Edinburgh and then South to London. I became involved in fringe theatre, women's groups and the gay rights movement. I no longer mixed with Jews, or if I did, we didn't discuss our Jewishness. Whatever deep secrets we

revealed to each other at consciousness-raising groups, we never discussed our ethnic origins. They seemed irrelevant. I abandoned the Friday night routine, but usually found my way to *shul* once a year. On *Yom Kippur* in Edinburgh I shared my *siddur* with an elderly tramp who had once told me her life story in a cafe when I bought her a cup of tea. I sat next to her because nobody else would, and because she was the only person I knew there. Finally, in the early seventies, I gave up even this once a year attendance. I was pregnant then, and if there was one thing I knew about nice Jewish girls, it was that they weren't unmarried mothers. Now I was well and truly beyond the Pale. Whenever I had to fill in an official form stating my religion I put Jewish, but I didn't feel Jewish. I felt lost. At some point during this period I spotted some graffiti in a bus reading "Wogs and Jews go home" and I missed my stop wondering just where home was.

When my son started school I went to university and took an MA in Religious Studies. I chose the subject because comparative religion — different cultures — had always interested me. I intended to specialise in Eastern religions, maybe even to learn Sanskrit, but by accident rather than design I found myself taking all the Judaism options, and the more I read, the more I came back to the point where I'd set off. I studied Hebrew, Jewish philosophers, Jewish psychologists and Jewish history. I discovered the Bund, and realised that not all Jews kept embossed heads of Churchill in their bedrooms. I went to Oxford to visit a fellow student and found a poem written in Yiddish. With my knowledge of Hebrew and a smattering of German from my schooldays I could just about stumble through it. The poem was Winchevsky's *Dray Shvester*. It was love at first sight.

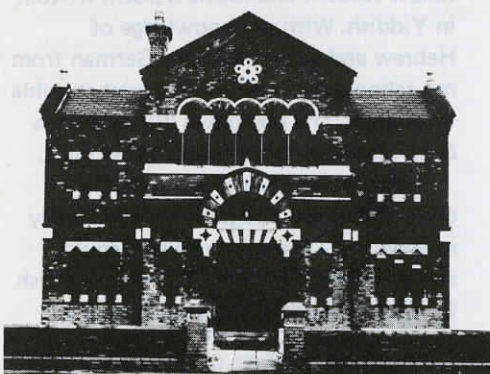
Learning Yiddish took me to the Oxford Summer Programme, and finally my son and I moved south so I could study Yiddish full time. Through Yiddish I met Jewish socialists, Jewish Marxists and Jewish feminists. I looked up many old friends in London from the CR days and found that lots of them were Jewish too. Some had been brought up by Yiddish speaking parents. Somewhere inside me a great rift was healing. My Jewishness and my socialism could not only co-exist, they were co-essential.

In January this year my son was *bar Mitzvah*. He was called up in my name and as I hadn't been given a Jewish name

(don't rock the boat) I took my grandmother's name, Shoshana. Since I found a way of linking all these apparently disparate threads together, he and I have made a lot of journeys. We've been to Corfu to try to trace our family there. We've found relations we didn't know existed and traced the Ashkenazi side of the family back to the seventeenth century. There are still a lot of questions that I can't produce satisfactory intellectual answers for. I can't, for example, really equate Jewish particularism with Socialist universalism, but then nor could Medem. All I really know for sure is that I've removed my son from the cultural no-man's-land that I grew up in. I doubt whether he'll ever sit on a bus and wonder where home is. □

All our yesterdays

Adrienne Wallman walks round our heritage.



Manchester Jewish Museum

Each time I take the bus along Cheetham Hill Road I feel a mixture of sadness and hope. Sadness because this road was once the heart of a vibrant Jewish community and now its synagogues and schools and community centres have either disappeared as a result of war or vandalism, or have been transformed into factories, the Magen David of the former New Synagogue sitting incongruously above a sign saying "Simon & Simon Lampshade Frame Manufacturers" or the United Synagogue now transformed into "Panarama Cash & Carry". But there is hope too because one of the synagogues, the beautiful Sephardi synagogue built in 1874, has been rescued and now houses the Manchester Jewish Museum.

To many people, museums are sad places — relics of forgotten lives, of no relevance to today. After all, the Jews of Manchester have moved up-town to Prestwich and Whitefield and Bury. They have brand new synagogues, they've made it. Why do they need a museum to tell them where they came from? And who's going to *shlep* down Cheetham Hill Road to go and look at it anyway?

Well I do for one. And so do visitors to the "events", for the museum isn't just "things in cases" it's about demonstrations (no, not in Trafalgar Square with banners!), like the craft of the *shmearer* (waterproof garment maker), and the jewellery maker, and the baker, and the butcher, which play to sell-out audiences. And there are wedding demonstrations too, under a real *chuppah* (canopy). The museum is also about preserving memories. Numerous interviews have been carried out with a wide section of the community and you can listen to the tapes while going round the displays. The "memory recall" sessions invite people to meet, reminisce and share their personal histories. And the museum genuinely represents the "people's history", from the slums of Red Bank, now obliterated by railway lines and debris, to the street games, the shops and the Palace of Varieties, to the earnest politics.

The history of Manchester Jewry is intimately bound up with the history of Manchester itself. A community began to grow up at the end of the 18th century as Manchester started to develop as a modern industrial city. As early as the 1840s there were a significant number of immigrants from Eastern Europe and they, and subsequent generations, have played an important role in the city's development.

They have much in common with

immigrant groups from other countries, but those who have moved on and out often don't want to remember that. The museum can serve to remind such people of their history. Just as importantly, through its permanent exhibition on the history of Manchester Jewry, and through temporary exhibitions on such diverse subjects as European Jewry before the Holocaust, Jewish weddings, immigrant trades, synagogue and society, it can present the community to the non-Jewish public in a much rounder, fuller way than usual.

Too often the Jewish community is judged (by itself) in terms of material achievement — witness the Board of Deputies' 225th anniversary exhibition (see JS 2) — or (by others) in terms of its relationship with or attitude towards Israel. The occasional religious festival may be studied by schoolchildren in the name of multiculturalism ("this week Succot, next week Diwali"). But the Jewish community is never seen in terms of its ordinary members — their early beginnings in this country, their struggle for survival and acceptance, their contribution towards *all* aspects of society (not just well known MPs and entertainers, often Jewish in name only).

The good thing about the Manchester Jewish Museum is that it is housed in a former synagogue still in situ (unlike the Museum of the Jewish East End which, unfortunately, is in Finchley in north London, although still doing a good job) so visitors do not just see a museum but learn about a whole way of life. They can also participate in heritage walks around the old Jewish quarter and see the Jewish Workingmen's (sic) Club (which encouraged its members to become good English citizens and where anything was allowed apart from speaking Yiddish and discussing politics), the Jews' School (which also strove to instil this Englishness into its pupils) and former synagogues now turned into factories. Of course, we're left asking the question — why this desire to throw off the original culture and become more English than the English? The museum takes us round in a circle to celebrate again the heritage that is in danger of being lost. And the present exhibition on European life before the Holocaust is a timely reminder of the ultimate pointlessness of assimilation.

It is to be hoped that as the museum develops it will be able to forge links with other ethnic groups in the city and become part of a truly multi-racial inheritance. □

Anne Frank in the World 1929-1945 is an international exhibition made by the Anne Frank Centre in Amsterdam, whose prime task is to fight all forms of discrimination and repression. The personal history of Anne Frank and her family serves as a powerful example of what happened to ordinary people during the Nazi era. The Exhibition is aimed largely at school children and its makers hope that focussing on this particular family will make it easier for children to identify with what happened to Jewish people, and bring the events of that period to life.

I knew it was an important exhibition. I found out how important when showing groups of schoolchildren round, and answering questions from both children and adults. The children asked the most difficult or, rather, the most obvious questions. 'Why did Hitler hate Jews?', 'Why didn't they run away/fight back/hide?'

I told them these were good questions which everyone found difficult to answer. (How do you explain 2,000 years of antisemitism to an eight-year-old from Pudsey?) Of course there *are* answers, and one of the most important (and true to the spirit of the exhibition) was to talk about discrimination and racism, scapegoats and economic depression. The exhibition illustrated such answers well. There were pictures of unemployed Germans and soup kitchens which many children in the north of England could relate to. They understood that someone who offered a simple answer would be popular and seemed horribly conversant with the idea that you could blame unemployment on a group which was obviously different. To see the Jews as this group was harder. Many had never met a Jew before. 'Are you a Jew, Miss?' asked two boys from Barnsley (and yes, they did have cloth caps). When I pointed out other Jewish people at the exhibition — volunteer guides of whom many were refugees from Germany or Holland — to some kids from Derbyshire they replied indignantly 'But that woman has blond hair.'

English classes who were reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* appreciated the pictures of Anne when she was little (especially the one of Margo powdering Anne's bottom) and enjoyed putting faces to the names they had read about. Religious Studies classes came, because they were studying Judaism. These had some wider knowledge about Jews which gave them a better and more balanced picture into which they could put the image of the Jew as object of hatred and victim. I am concerned that children without any other knowledge of Jews or Judaism came away from the exhibition with exactly that picture. But this could not be within the brief of the exhibition.

The Nazi era was brought to life for history classes. They could see the faces behind the swastika armbands, though I was surprised how many children, even older ones, didn't recognise the swastika

THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD



ANNE FRANK
IN THE WORLD
1929-1945

Last November, Leeds became the first city outside London to host the Anne Frank Exhibition.

Funded by Leeds City Council,
Tessa M. Shephard was employed to co-ordinate the running of the Exhibition. She describes what she taught and what she learnt.

and most didn't know its name. One teacher taught me the importance of showing that though the swastika had been a symbol of fascism, it was first an Indian religious symbol, familiar to many of the Asian children. A woman accompanying a group of children looked at pictures of an antisemitic carnival in 1934 and said that she didn't understand where antisemitism came from. The depth of people's ignorance about antisemitism never ceased to amaze me, and I was all the more disappointed because this woman was with a group of Woodcraft Folk.

The exhibition also focussed on other groups who suffered persecution. It showed that much of the opposition to Hitler came from the Left. A picture of an anti-Nazi demonstration organised by the Eiserne Front (an association of several left-wing organisations) showed two young people raising clenched fists. At first sight the picture could have been of a Nazi youth rally — with the flags and

uniforms. But one volunteer, a refugee from Germany who got out in 1939, told me that all organisations at that time, of whatever political hue, had this militaristic flavour. He pointed to a picture of a Hitler Youth march where a small boy was carrying an enormous drum, saying he had had a drum just like that in the Jewish youth group he had belonged to. One picture showed a large Trade Union building displaying the Eiserne Front's symbol, three white arrows pointing left: a graphic illustration of the Labour Movement's opposition to Hitler.

The history of the Dutch Nazi party (the NSB) showed that fascism was not peculiar to the Germans. (German and Nazi were synonymous to most of the children I spoke to.) The exhibition also showed the Germans who did oppose Hitler. There is a picture of Sophie and Hans Scholl, sister and brother who were active members of *Die Weisse Rose*, a student resistance organisation in Munich in 1942, and one of a German boy of 17



who was shot for distributing anti-Nazi leaflets. The pain of their execution becomes real when you can see their eyes. A picture that always shook me when I walked past it, was of a young woman in the Baum Group — a Jewish Socialist resistance group in Berlin. She was executed in 1943.

There were many pictures of children — beautiful ones of Anne Frank and her sister Margot, as well as German children in the Hitler Youth and at school, learning about racial superiority. A group of Asian girls from Bradford understood all too well that people could be discriminated against because of the colour of their skin. To a group of white, gentile children from Pudsey you had to try and make them imagine, for example, what it would be like if people with blue eyes couldn't go to school or to the cinema or have a job just because they had blue eyes. One picture worked particularly well:

it showed someone having their ear measured. I would ask them what they thought was happening in the picture. 'He's having his ear cut off!' was the usual answer, said with glee. When I explained that he was having his ear measured because the Nazis said you could decide what race someone belonged to and therefore whether they were better or worse than you by the size of their ears, there would be a chorus of: 'That's stupid.' A group of disabled trainees from a YTS scheme were struck by the section which talked about 'racial purity', 'health' and forced sterilisation. One young woman in a wheelchair realised after reading it that she wouldn't have been allowed to have children.

The exhibition ended with sections on Neo-Nazi groups and the denial of the Holocaust, on the way in which anti-Zionism is often used as a cover for present-day antisemitism, and on racism

today. There were examples of racist propaganda from all over Europe and the US. The Neo-Fascist and racist groups' use of the swastika as their symbol linked this with the pictures of Hitler's Germany and the death of Anne Frank. The use of the Jews as scapegoats and the resulting pictures from the concentration camps was linked with National Front slogans like 'Send them back'. A wonderful teacher brought all her kids together in this part of the exhibition to discuss the NF and racism.

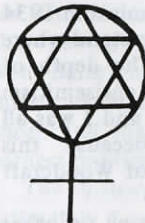
Not all the children dutifully went round, soberly taking in all the information. Some had problems reading the text or concentrating for such a long time so we also had two films which made a great impact. *Just a Diary* was about Anne Frank — her life and death and her diary. The other was an American film called *Through Our Eyes* — the stories of many children and their experiences during the Holocaust. The reactions to the films varied. Some teachers thought the second film too harrowing, others said it wasn't harrowing enough. Certainly many kids were upset by the films, some teachers came out crying but I must admit to some relief at seeing a rowdy group who thought it was all quite a laugh shut up abruptly as the films began. After all, the job of the exhibition was to shock — to remind people of what antisemitism and racism really mean. As the Anne Frank Foundation says, '... the rejection and prevention of discrimination must start at an early age ... and each of us has a personal responsibility toward achieving this goal. Had these convictions shaped the human consciousness in the 1930s, then the name Hitler would be totally insignificant to us today.' □

The exhibition will be touring Britain over the coming year and is currently in Newcastle. If you want to know more about the Anne Frank Centre in Amsterdam, or wish to make a contribution to its work, please write to The Anne Frank House, Prinsengracht 263, Amsterdam, 1016 GV, The Netherlands.

JEWISH FEMINIST CONFERENCE

When? May 22-24
Bank holiday weekend

Where? Beechwood
Conference Centre
Leeds



A chance for Jewish Women from a wide range of backgrounds to get together and share ideas and experiences. There will be workshops on a variety of themes; all contributions and suggestions most welcome. There'll also be song, dance and celebration!

To keep costs to a minimum, donations and fund-raising activities by local groups are essential.

Interested? Contact:

Sharon Gold
11 Pasture Grove
Leeds
LS7 4QP

Jenny Goodman
48 Whitehouse Rd.
Sheffield
S6 2WB

Tess Shephard
3b Marlborough Grove
Leeds
LS2 9AJ

Letters

FAITH RESTORED

I have just read my first copy of *Jewish Socialist* (No 8). My faith in other Jews and other socialists has been rejuvenated. Compliments to the editors.

Barry Golten
Bristol

CHIEF COMPLAINT

On 11 November 1986, the Chief Rabbi, speaking at a lunchtime lecture on the general theme of when rabbis should venture an opinion (and when not), expressed the firm opinion that, on South Africa, "we" should not be "running with the hounds" and that, to single out that country for opprobrium, would be to "exhibit double-standards".

Last Sunday, on the radio programme, *You don't have to be Jewish*, the Chief, recently back from South Africa expressed the view that there were no sections of South Africa society more opposed to apartheid than the students, the business people and the Jewish community there. Presumably it is only "polite" society that is being contemplated, since the news would otherwise doubtless be intriguing to the ANC, Black trade unions, non-racial trade unions and the UDF.

Dave Shepherd
London NW4

JONAH LIVES

Some readers of *Jewish Socialist* may have been under the impression that JONAH (Jews Organised for a Nuclear Arms Halt) was no longer functioning. In fact the London committee disbanded last year but the Leeds based group continues and has taken over all the functions of the national group. The Leeds group is very active and there is a full programme of activities planned for the next few months. We would like, now, to encourage the establishment of other groups around the country. The Leeds group can provide speakers, materials and any other help that we can.

JONAH membership costs £5 (waged) or £3 (unwaged) and anyone interested in joining or establishing a new local group should contact me at 12 Shaftesbury Road, Leeds LS8 1BX Yorks.

Stuart Linke
JONAH

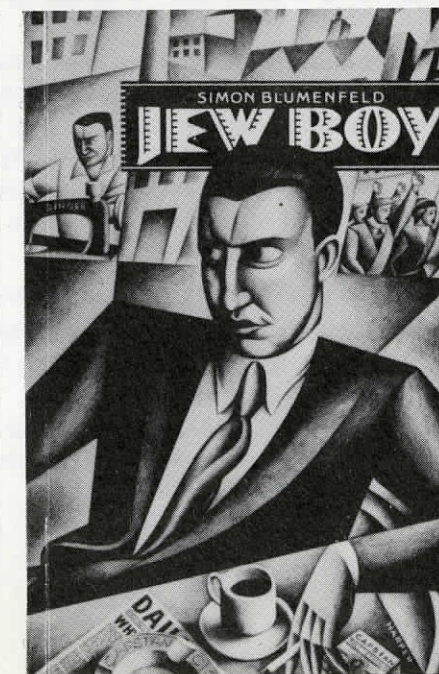
Today the workshop tomorrow the world!

Jew Boy by Simon Blumenfeld (Lawrence and Wishart, £4.95)

They are either highly academic, or coffee-table glossy, or shmaltzy sentimental. Books about the history of the Jewish East End are compulsive but disappointing. Few provide the insight that we seek into our roots, or speak to us in a way that is accessible. For a glimpse into the authentic experience of being a Jewish immigrant, we have to rely on the recounting of our grandparents. The literature does not match up to their vibrancy and honesty.

Simon Blumenfeld's *Jew Boy*, written in 1935 and recently re-published with an introduction by Ken Worpole, has the clarity of expression we normally associate with oral history. It is proudly a Jewish socialist novel and stands as a monument to the spirit of the Jewish East End with its richly integrated cultural and political life. The scenes in the sweatshops, on political demonstrations, in the Workers' Circle and in the markets leave us with the feeling that "it must have been like this." It is a uniquely Jewish novel; so readable as to be almost edible!

The central character is Alec, a working-class Jewish boy in the tailoring trade,



who is critical of his world and has a socialist vision of how to change it. While he is drawn to trade-unionism and left-wing politics, his friend Dave is unprincipled and only interested in casual sex. Alec wryly observes that his friend, with his parents' financial help, will, "get married, become a prosperous business man, raise a strictly orthodox family and probably finish up as President of the local synagogue."

While Dave is to follow the conformist's path, Alec breaks away from his mother and the ghetto to live with a non-Jewish woman who has been a prostitute. The book ends with his friendship with a black communist, as he pledges his dedication to the "world-wide fellowship" of international politics — "No peace until the disinherited regain the earth!"

The novel has a clear message that nationalism should be discarded for workers' unity. The young people who hanker after a Zionist dream are portrayed as naive: "the workshops and factories had taught him how much his nationalism was worth." As Alec powerfully states, "I don't see why I should change one set of exploiters for another because they happen to be Jewish." Indeed, the most potent scenes in the novel are when Jews as workers band together; in the walk-out against the inhuman Bedaux "payment by results" system and in the marches where there is a heady sense of commitment and togetherness. The concluding scenes of black and Jewish alliance to change the world are optimistic and stirring. Despite our knowledge of future events and the comfortable, unradical nature of Anglo-Jewry today, the image of a working-class boy striving for change, equality and against oppression, provides a blueprint for our own action.

Perhaps the novel makes it all seem too easy. Joining the Communist Party is seen as "coming home". The book, for all its provocative title, provides few scenes of outright antisemitism and there is the sense that this will disappear when the workers rule the world.

The *Jewish Chronicle* said that the book was "spoilt by preaching the pro-Stalin socialism of the day." Which is why, of course, we will want to read it.

Anne Krisman

WHERE WE STAND

Socialism has been central to the modern Jewish experience. The struggle for our rights as Jews has been closely allied with the fight of oppressed humanity. Collectively and individually, Jewish women and men have contributed enormously to working class struggles and progressive movements.

In Britain in 1987 our Jewish establishment actively oppose progressive causes; many Jews have enjoyed considerable social and economic mobility; and the general image held of the Jewish community, apparently confirmed by its institutions, is one of relative comfort and security.

But there is an economic and political power structure in the community and this picture is drawn in the image of its more affluent and powerful elements. The Jewish community is diverse, as are the social positions and interests of its component parts.

In Britain today, with mass unemployment and economic stagnation, an increasingly authoritarian political atmosphere in which racist and chauvinist ideas have gained "respectability", we view the interests of most Jews as linked with those of other threatened minorities and the broader labour movement. Our common interest lies in the socialist transformation of society.

- * We stand for the rights of Jews, as Jews, in a socialist future.
- * We fight for a socialist movement, embracing the cultural autonomy of minorities, as essential to the achievement of socialism.
- * We draw on our immigrant experience and anti-racist history in order to challenge antisemitism, racism, sexism and fascism today. We support the rights of, and mobilize solidarity with, all oppressed groups.
- * We recognise the equal validity and integrity of all Jewish communities, and reject the ideology, currently dominating world Jewry, which subordinates the needs and interests of Diaspora Jews to those of the Israeli state.
- * We support a socialist solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict based on recognition of national rights and self determination, including statehood, of the Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab peoples.

We believe that without a revived progressive political movement within the Jewish community in Britain, its present problems of individual identity, cultural stagnation and organisational apathy will grow worse. Without a transformation of the present economic and political structure of society, a widespread resurgence of antisemitism is to be expected. And unless the socialist movement abandons assimilationist tendencies and recognises the important contribution that different groups have to make in their own way, it cannot achieve real unity or the emancipation and equality to which it has constantly aspired.

JOIN THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP NOW
WRITE TO: MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY, JSG, BM 3725 LONDON WC1N 3XX

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

There are many strands of Jewish life and experience but only a few voices are heard. This is not because the others have nothing to say but because they lack a place in which to say it. **JEWISH SOCIALIST** gives a voice to radical Jews and is dedicated to reaching the parts of Jewish and socialist life that other publications cannot or will not touch.

JEWISH SOCIALIST is published four times a year.

Don't be left without your copy of **JEWISH SOCIALIST**. Subscribe today by sending the form below to JSG BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX

Please send me **JEWISH SOCIALIST** for a year.

I enclose £4.50 (inc p&p). I also enclose a donation of £.....Total cheque/PO £.....

Name.....

Address.....

.....

USA, ISRAEL and other countries £8